

Israel Wanted to Bless Both Sons of Joseph

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain the fact that both Jacob and Joseph showed, by their actions, that they had their hope and confidence in the promises that God would one day bring Israel out of Egypt and take them to the land of Canaan. In this topic, we see that Joseph took his sons with him and went to visit his father.

Genesis 48:1-4 says, “Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Indeed your father *is sick*’; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Jacob was told, ‘Look, your son Joseph is coming to you’; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph: ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 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.”’” One day, Joseph received word that his father was sick. Joseph knew that his father could die, so he took his two sons with him and went to visit his father. These two sons would have been in their late teens or early twenties since they were born before the famine began. Manasseh was the older of the two, and Ephraim was the younger.

Jacob was told when Joseph arrived at his house that Joseph was coming to visit him. Although Jacob was weak, he strengthened himself so that he was sitting up in his bed by the time Joseph came into the room. The word translated “strengthened” means to *be strong or to make strong*. Just the news that Joseph would be there in a few minutes made it possible for Jacob to strengthen himself. This is an important lesson. Many times, when people are sick and very weak, they just lie in bed. However, when they hear that someone is coming to visit them, they are able to strengthen themselves. This shows us that visits to those who are weak, and may be facing death, provide encouragement to them even though they are very weak. That was what happened when Jacob heard that Joseph was coming to visit him.

Jacob wanted to remind Joseph of the promise God had given to Abraham and Isaac and had repeated to him when he was fleeing from his brother on his way to the house of Laban. At that time, the Lord had spoken to Jacob through a dream. First, God had given Jacob a personal blessing. Jacob remembered that personal blessing, as he said, “God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me.” After God spoke to him, Jacob changed the name of that place from Luz to Bethel, which means “house of God.” Second, God promised that his descendants would be blessed and told Jacob, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people.” Jacob was beginning to see the start of the fulfillment of that promise. However, most of that development into a great nation happened after the death

of Jacob. Third, God had promised his descendants would be given the land of Canaan as God told Jacob that He would, “give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.” That promise is still in effect, because God said that the land that would be given to him, and his descendants, would be an everlasting possession.

Genesis 48:5-9 says, “And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, *are* mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when *there was* but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).’ Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons, and said, ‘Who *are* these?’ And Joseph said to his father, ‘They *are* my sons, whom God has given me in this *place*.’ And he said, ‘Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.’” Here, we see that Israel gave the double portion or double blessing to Joseph by telling him that both of his sons would be considered as the sons of Israel. Notice that once Jacob changed the status of the two sons of Joseph, Jacob is called Israel in the rest of this chapter, because those called his sons now included two grandsons.

Throughout the Old Testament, we see that the Levites served and assisted the priests. To do this, they were scattered in cities throughout the land of Israel. The priests all came from the family of Aaron, as he was from the tribe of Levi. That meant the tribe of Levi was not counted as one of the twelve tribes of Israel. The Lord chose to have Israel give the blessing to Joseph so he would have the double blessing. This meant that two tribes came from Joseph and were named after these two sons of Joseph. Each of the two sons became a separate tribe, so when you read the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, the list contains the names of both Manasseh and Ephraim, but does not include the tribe of Levi. Israel also told Joseph that if Joseph had any additional sons in the future, their descendants would be included within the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim. In this way, the nation of Israel would remain a nation of twelve tribes.

Israel also talked about the mother of Joseph. When Jacob and his family were moving from Padan Aram to the land of Canaan, Rachel died in childbirth as she was giving birth to Benjamin. That death happened just before they arrived at Ephrath. The place called Ephrath later had its name changed to Bethlehem. Of course, that is the town where Christ was born and was only about five miles from the city of Jerusalem. Genesis 35:19-20 says, “So Rachel died and was buried on the way to Ephrath (that *is*, Bethlehem). And Jacob set a pillar on her grave, which *is* the pillar of Rachel’s grave to this day.” From this statement, we see that Rachel was buried in the place where she died. This place later became part of the land given to the tribe of Judah.

Joseph had also taken his two sons with him when he went to see his father. As a result, Israel saw that his two sons were with Joseph. Israel then asked Joseph who they were. Joseph replied that they were his two sons. Joseph went on to tell his father that God had

given him these two sons while he was in the land of Egypt. Here, we see that Joseph was faithful in giving all of the glory to God for the sons God had given him. This shows that Joseph recognized God had guided him in everything that happened in his life. These sons had both been born during the seven years of plenty before the famine had started. Genesis 41:50 says, “And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him.” The famine had already been going for two years when the brothers of Joseph came to Egypt. Then, Israel had lived seventeen years in Egypt. As a result, these sons were either in their late teens or early twenties at this time. Israel immediately said, “Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.” Here, we see that Israel was going to give that blessing to complete the promise he had just made to Joseph.

Genesis 48:10-13 says, “Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, *so that* he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, ‘I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!’ So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought *them* near him.” Here, we see that the eyes of Israel were dim with age so he could not see clearly. This meant he could not recognize the faces of Manasseh and Ephraim. Joseph brought his sons close to his father and Israel kissed them and embraced them.

Israel was also very thankful for this day. For twenty-two years, he thought Joseph was dead. Then that day came when the brothers said Joseph was alive and was the ruler of the land of Egypt next to Pharaoh. Israel had come to Egypt and had seen his son, Joseph. However, God had also given him the opportunity to see the two sons of Joseph. Even though Israel was weak from his sickness, this was a great privilege for him to see and know that these were the two sons of Joseph. That was the reason that Israel said, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!” These final years of Israel, in Egypt, were probably some of the best years in the life of Israel because of the fact that he knew the Lord had preserved the life of Joseph and brought him to the land of Egypt to preserve the lives of many people. In addition, the Lord gave Israel the privilege of seeing the sons of Joseph, even though it may have been hard for him to see them clearly because of the poor eyesight he was experiencing due to his age.

Israel had said that he wanted to bless both of the sons of Joseph. As a result, we see that Joseph brought his two sons close to Israel so he could bless them. Since Israel was almost blind, Joseph guided his oldest son, Manasseh, toward the right hand of Israel. He guided the younger son, Ephraim, toward the left hand of Israel. It was the custom of the cultures of that area to give the greater blessing to the older son if two sons were blessed. That was done by laying the right hand on the head of the older son. Joseph was trying to make that easier for his father to do by guiding Manasseh toward the right hand of Israel,

and Ephraim toward the left hand of Israel. Since Jacob had stolen the blessing from his own father by deceiving him, he wanted to make sure he did not get deceived as he blessed both of the sons of Joseph. We will see in the next topic that Israel knew which son to whom he wanted to give the greater blessing. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the family of Abraham did not always follow the culture of that day to bless the oldest son, but rather blessed the son whom the Lord chose to bless in a special way. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain why God may choose in a different way than men.