

Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons, Manasseh and Ephraim Genesis 48:12-22

Genesis 48:12-22 - *"So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. ¹³ 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. ¹⁴ Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, ¹⁶ the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."*

¹⁷ Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."

¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.

²² Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Background Notes

After Jacob officially adopted Joseph's sons to make them heads of two tribes in Israel, he blessed them. *"So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth" (v12).* In that culture, the position "beside the knees" was the place for the official adoption transaction. Notice that they were not sitting on his knees – they were young men in their early twenties at this time. The fact that Joseph bowed down with his face to the earth shows us the solemnity of this occasion.

When the blessing took place, Joseph naturally brought Manasseh, his firstborn, to Jacob's right side, and Ephraim, the younger son, to Jacob's left side. Thus Jacob's right hand of blessing would be on Manasseh's head, because Manasseh was the older son. But old Jacob, whose eyes were dim with age (v10), deliberately crossed his arms so that the right hand of blessing was placed on the head of Ephraim, the younger son.

Joseph thought his father was making a mistake, and he tried to uncross Jacob's arms. But Jacob knew what he was doing and he would not change: *"But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations" (v19).*

And this blessing came true. Ephraim and Manasseh both became great tribes in Israel, but Ephraim became the greater tribe. In fact, the tribe of Ephraim became so prestigious that the entire northern kingdom of Israel, ten of the twelve tribes, became known as "Ephraim." Read the book of Hosea in this connection.

In verse 22 Jacob told Joseph, *“Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.”* It seems that this *“portion”* referred to that special plot of land that Jacob bought from Hamor, the king of Shechem, back in Genesis 33. Apparently after Jacob left the area of Shechem, he had to go back and reclaim this land by force. This plot of land is also mentioned in Joshua 24, when Joseph’s bones were buried there. In addition, this piece of land is mentioned in John 4, when the Lord met the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well, which was located on this land. This special plot of land was deeded over to Joseph.

Doctrinal Points

1. God progressively reveals His character to growing Christians.

Notice how Jacob referred to God in verses 15-16: *“And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads. Let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”*

That is certainly **very** different than the way Jacob referred to God after his dream at Bethel! Genesis 28:16: *“Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely the LORD is in this place, and I did not know it.”* What was the difference? Jacob had matured as a believer. He had grown in faith as he went through the School of God, and as God progressively revealed, or made known, his character to Jacob.

- Jacob had come to know God as a **God who makes and keeps his covenants**. That is the primary idea in the first clause of verse 15: *“God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked...”*
- Jacob had come to know **God as a Good Shepherd**. That’s the idea in the second phrase of verse 15: *“The God who has fed me all my life long to this day...”* This is the first mention in the Bible of the word **“shepherd.”**
- Jacob had come to know **God as the Angel who had redeemed him from all evil** (v16). The idea here is that the Lord God had taken Jacob out of situations of evil, and had protected him from evil. This, by the way, is the first use of the word **“redeemed”** in the Bible. The “Angel” mentioned here, of course, would be “the Angel of the Lord.” The Angel of the Lord was not just any angel that had been created by God, but **the Angel of the Lord - the Lord Himself!**

So God progressively revealed himself to Jacob, and Jacob matured in faith. This should be true in our lives as well. As we grow in faith, and God continues to make Himself known to us, we come to know God more, and we should grow in faith and in our walk as Christians. It’s a wonderful progression!

Have you come to know God as Jacob did? Have you come to know God as your Promise-Keeper? Have you come to know God as your Good Shepherd, the One who cares for you? Have you come to know God as your Redeemer? Have you come to know Him as your Protector from evil? God progressively reveals His character to growing Christians.

2. God progressively reveals His program to growing Christians.

When Jacob officially adopted Joseph's two sons and blessed them, it was not a spur of the moment idea. It's clear that God had revealed to Jacob what he should do. How do we know that? Hebrews 11:21 tells us, *"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff."*

Biblical faith is always based on what God has revealed! When Hebrews 11:21 says that **by faith** Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh, we can be sure that this was not something Jacob dreamed up by himself. No, God revealed this to him. When did God reveal this to Jacob? We don't know, but it was certainly after Jacob arrived in Egypt, and after he was reunited with his son Joseph. God progressively revealed his program to Jacob.

It's very interesting that even Joseph, to whom God gave the gift of interpretation of prophetic dreams, was not aware of God's program! Jacob, however, was sensitive to God's program.

God progressively reveals His program to growing Christians. According to Ephesians 1:9-10: *"having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him."*

One of our spiritual blessings is the knowledge of God's program for the world. There are many Scriptures that give us the details of God's coming program, but many Christians are not aware of these future events. Why? Because they are not **growing** Christians! They're more interested in their own lives and their earthly programs, so they're not studying God's Word to learn what He has revealed about God's program for the future. God progressively reveals His program to growing Christians.

Practical Applications

1. Have you experienced God's "crossed hands of blessing"?

What do we mean by this? Well, the natural way for the patriarchal blessing of children was for the firstborn, Manasseh, to receive the greater blessing. However, Jacob knew that it was God's will for Ephraim to receive the greater blessing. So Jacob crossed his hands, or crossed his arms, in compliance with God's will. It was not the normal and natural way – but it was **God's** way!

This is still true today. Many times God departs from the natural, normal, expected way of doing things because, as He says in Isaiah 55:8-9, *"My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."*

Many times this is true in the way God blesses us. Let me share with you an area where I believe I have experienced God's "crossed hands of blessing." I'm a research scientist by nature and by education, and I don't have a natural talent for writing. In fact, I don't like to write! It's a lot of work for me to write. I scribble and scratch and tear up and start over - and trying to write on the computer keyboard doesn't help, either! Some of you have read "*Devotions for Growing Christians*," and you might think, "Oh, Dave Reid just sits down and whips that thing off in no time!" No! Not so! Hours and hours go into writing each "*Devotion*," because writing is not my natural talent. But here's the point: God has "crossed His hands" of blessing! He has led me to write, and He has blessed me in this area - even though writing is not my natural talent.

I'm sure you have illustrations of God's "crossed hands" of blessing that you have experienced in your life. Think about it! Have you experienced God's "crossed hands" of blessing?

2. Let's be like Joseph in reference to our children!

When Joseph realized what God's will was for his sons, he submitted to it. As the sons of the prime minister, Ephraim and Manasseh would have had every opportunity to advance in Egyptian society and become very successful and influential men in Egypt. But Joseph wanted the very best for his sons, so **he looked beyond their material success and advancement in Egypt**. He wanted God's will, and when God's will was obvious, he submitted to it.

By the way, Ephraim and Manasseh showed great faith here too. Remember - they were young men in their early twenties, but they were willing to walk away from all the status and potential of Egypt, and identify with their Bedouin-shepherd-type relatives. This shows, by the way, that Joseph had raised his sons in the faith and knowledge of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Parents - what do we want for our children? Stop and think about that for a minute! What do we **really** want for our children? Are we planning and striving only for their success in this world - or are we looking for God's will for their lives? And are we **teaching them** to look for God's will for their lives?

In addition, once we clearly see God's will for our children, are we willing to submit to it – no matter what it may entail? Let's be like Joseph in reference to our children!