



**Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 25, 2007**  
**Released on November 21, 2007**

**"Jacob Blesses His Family"**

**Printed Text: Genesis 48:11-19**

**Background Scripture: Genesis 48:8-21**

**Devotional Reading: Psalm 145:1-13**

**Genesis 48:11-19**

GEN. 48:11 And Is'ra-el said unto Jo'seph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed.

12 And Jo'seph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

13 And Jo'seph took them both, E'phra-im in his right hand toward Is'ra-el's left hand, and Ma-nas'seh in his left hand toward Is'ra-el's right hand, and brought *them* near unto him.

14 And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid *it* upon E'phraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Ma-nas'seh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Ma-nas'seh was the firstborn.

15 And he blessed Jo'seph, and said, God, before whom my fathers A'bra-ham 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 A'braham and I'saac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

17 And when Jo'seph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of E'phra-im, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from E'phra-im's head unto Ma-nas'seh'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.

**INTRODUCTION**

The concept of giving and receiving a blessing is less common in our culture than it was in biblical times. Most children nevertheless recognize that receiving approval from their parents is extremely important. In our study of Genesis we have already seen how Esau sold his birthright and then how Jacob stole the paternal blessing from him. Since words were considered both powerful and irrevocable, even a stolen blessing was considered valid.

Of particular significance in the world of the Bible was the father's blessing upon his son. This was no mere formality, either. It actually passed on property rights and authority to the one being blessed.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

In the previous chapters, Joseph's brothers followed his instructions concerning their move. They took the wagons Pharaoh gave them, returned to Canaan, and brought Jacob (their father) and the rest of the family to Egypt. All together, 70 souls ended up in the land of Egypt. These included Joseph and his children, who were already there (Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5).

It was a stirring moment when Jacob and Joseph met. They clung to one another and wept for a long time (Genesis 46:29, 30). Some of the family even were privileged to meet Pharaoh. At that point Jacob (also known as Israel) was 130 years old (47:9); he lived another 17 years (47:28).

Jacob was nearly blind as he approached the time of his death (Genesis 47:29; 48:10). Like his father before him, Jacob sensed the urgency to settle his affairs (compare 27:1-4). A primary task was to bestow blessings on his sons and grandsons. This was an intentional ceremony, not a casual afterthought. Joseph, through his two sons, received a double portion. Judah received the blessing that stated that the line of the Messiah would pass through the tribe (compare Genesis 49:9-12 with Hebrews 7:14; Revelation 5:5).

Our lesson this week shows us the significance of this blessing today and looks at the blessing given to Manasseh and Ephraim, Jacob's grandsons. The year is about 1860 BC.

## **TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to show the significance of the patriarchal blessing and to understand the manner in which Jacob bestowed it on his progeny.

**Principle:** to show that God's blessing was a recognition of His goodness.

**Application:** Pass along a spiritual heritage by explaining to someone else his or her own walk with the Lord.

### **1. What were the names of Joseph's sons?**

Joseph, the son of Jacob, had two sons. Their names were Ephraim (who was the youngest) and Manasseh (who was the oldest). They were born to Joseph and the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On in the land of Egypt before the famine. The famine came some time later and was very severe. After a number of years passed, the famine was over and Israel (Jacob) was blessed beyond measure. His possessions grew and multiplied exceedingly (Gen. 47:27) and he lived in Egypt for 17 years. As Genesis, Chapter 48 opens, we see that Joseph is told his father is very ill and he gathers up his two sons and heads off to see his father.

### **Unexpected Meeting (Genesis 48:11, 12)**

## **2. How did Jacob feel about getting to see Joseph once again? (Genesis 48:11, 12)**

Between Jacob's arrival in Egypt and the events in this week's text, a number of years passed. As Genesis 48 opens, Jacob was old and ill. After reminding Joseph of the promise that Canaan was to be "an everlasting possession" (vs. 4), Jacob spoke of Joseph's two sons. The aged patriarch declared, "Thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt . . . are mine" (vs. 5). By this he meant that he was formally adopting them as his sons.

"Jacob gave the birthright to Joseph by elevating Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, to the rank of firstborn sons, thus giving a double portion to Joseph. . . . The recognition of Joseph's sons would have an effect on the apportioning of the land of promise years later in the days of Joshua" (Walvoord and Zuck, eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary*, Cook).

What was particularly amazing to Jacob was the fact that he had thought he would never see his favorite son, Joseph, again (vs. 11). Not only had he been reunited with his beloved son, but he was now privileged to see the sons of Joseph as well. After Joseph's sons had been embraced and kissed by Jacob, Joseph then took his sons from Jacob's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. This was a solemn occasion that elicited homage from the man who was second only to Pharaoh in Egypt.

## **3. What is another name for Jacob?**

Let's begin by making sure that we don't get confused by names. *Israel* was the new name given to Jacob at Peniel (Genesis 32:24–30). Thus, Israel and Jacob are one and the same person. The name Israel means "one who struggles with God"; this depicts the entire life of Jacob. Jacob's original name meant "heel grabber" or, figuratively, "manipulator." Jacob's new name, Israel, is a covenant name. The importance of this name is seen in the fact that the designations Israel and Israelite(s) appear more than 2,500 times in the Bible!

## **Switched Blessing (Genesis 48:13–16)**

### **4. How did Jacob place his hands on Joseph's sons? Why did he do this? (vs. 13-14)**

After Jacob had embraced and kissed his grandchildren, Joseph then took his sons and bowed down with his face to the ground showing respect to his father, a man of high esteem. Now the blessing is at hand.

Joseph proceeded to place his sons in the proper positions for the blessing that was about to be bestowed upon them. Of particular significance, however, was the manner in which Jacob (or Israel) placed his hands on the boys' heads.

The right hand was normally placed on the head of the oldest son, in this case, Manasseh. Jacob, however, crossed his arms and placed his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Although "the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see" (Gen. 48:10), the actions of the patriarch were no mistake. He had purposely guided his hands to the positions where they had come to rest.

The theme of the younger sibling having preference over the older is one that we have already seen in Genesis. "The elder shall serve the younger" (25:23) was the promise God made when Jacob and Esau were still in the womb.

### **5. How can we use special occasions in the church to pass along blessings to the generation to follow—that is, to give solemn reminders of and encouragement in the Christian faith?**

Baptisms, weddings, and funerals are "blessable moments," if we may coin that expression. The baptism of a teenager may include an exhortation to parents that they be diligent in rearing their children in the fear of God. The sermon in a wedding ceremony can include the same exhortation. The funeral service for a deceased Christian is an ideal time to remind other family members that there is a spiritual heritage to be embraced and carried forward.

### **6. What did Jacob say about God's care of him? (vs. 15)**

As Joseph's sons are being blessed, *Joseph* is blessed as well. An important aspect of the blessing is for Israel to recall those whom God led and cared for previously, namely his grandfather, *Abraham*, and his father, *Isaac*. These two walked in the way of the Lord.

The phrase "fed me all my life" is to be understood as something as "guided me all my life." God has indeed cared for Israel all of his life. God cared for him when he fled to Padan-aram and when he left that place to return home. Had God not intervened, Laban, Israel's uncle and father-in-law, may have killed him (Genesis 31:24, 29). God cared for Israel when he returned to Canaan. God cared for him in his encounter with his brother Esau. God cared for him and his family when Simeon and Levi massacred the men at Shechem (34:25; 35:5).

The last great testimony to that care was when Joseph sent for him to come to Egypt to live. Imagery of God's care is very powerful in the Bible. See Psalm 23 and the picture of Jesus as the good shepherd in John 10:11–18.

### **7. Who is the "Angel" mentioned in Genesis 48:16?**

The reference to the "Angel" in Genesis 48:16 most likely refers to the Lord. Many scholars believe that this angel was actually an appearance of God in human form rather than being a created angel, as we may normally think. We read of visits by "the angel of the Lord" to various people in the Old Testament. At some point in the narrative the statement may switch from "angel of the Lord" to "Lord." For example, compare Genesis 16:7–12 with 16:13; also compare 22:15 with 22:16. Thus the phrase *angel of the Lord* could be another way of saying *Lord* or *God*. In some cases, however, the angel of the Lord seems to be distinct from God (see 2 Samuel 24:16; Zechariah 1:11–13; Luke 1:11).

With the phrase "bless the lads", Jacob begins the blessing. He further prayed that Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would "grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (Gen. 48:16). This calls to mind the promises made to Abraham and Isaac and should be understood as being fulfilled in later Hebrew history.

## **Attempted Correction (Genesis 48:17–19)**

### **8. How did Joseph feel about his father placing his right hand on his younger son? What did he do? (vs. 17-18)**

Although Jacob was old and unable to see clearly, he knew what he was doing when he transposed his hands and blessed Joseph's sons in the manner he did. Joseph was displeased that his father had done this, though, and sought to correct the aged patriarch by placing his hands on his sons as he thought they should be. Apparently Joseph thought that the old man was confused about the position in which he had placed his hands on his sons. "And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head." However, the aged patriarch refused to alter the position of his hands and declared, "I know it, my son, I know it." "Jacob's words . . . expressed the confidence of his faith: he was blessing according to the divine plan, not according to normal custom. He had learned that in spite of what man attempted to do God had blessed him, the younger. This he now carried forward to Joseph's sons" (Walvoord and Zuck).

After Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph, he gathered his sons around him and foretold what would happen to each of them in days to come (Gen. 49). The subsequent future of the nation of Israel reveals that these prophecies were fulfilled with amazing accuracy. At the conclusion of these prophecies, Jacob "yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people" (vs. 33).

### **9. What other examples do we have of younger sons being preferred over the older?**

Some other examples of younger sons being preferred over the older are: Abel above Cain, Shem above Japheth, Abraham above Nahor and Haran, Isaac above Ishmael, Jacob above Esau; Judah and Joseph were preferred before Reuben, Moses before Aaron, David and Solomon before their elder brethren" (Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

### **10. What lesson might such reversals have for us?**

As we think about how this might apply to us, we are reminded that "God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty" (1 Corinthians 1:27).

It is quite amazing that God uses so many ordinary people. Some of the most effective Christians are those who receive little attention. More important than ability is availability!

Just as Jacob and Joseph saw that God's ways are not the same as ours, so we need to have faith in the working of God in our lives. Perhaps if we look back we can see how God has worked in our lives to bring us to where we are today. We can use that experience as something to build our faith on. God still has a plan, and He is working it out in our lives even today.

## **CONCLUSION**

### **Leaving a Legacy**

How important it is to leave a legacy! Israel (Jacob) had received a legacy from his father, who had received it in turn from *his* father. Then it was Israel's turn to leave it to the following generation. Life goes on a generation at a time. Each generation builds upon (or destroys) what the previous generation leaves behind.

A legacy can be thought of as a kind of inheritance. Usually when we think of an inheritance, we think of cash and various physical assets. A much more important inheritance is a spiritual one. What kind of people will live in and lead the next generation? Very often, people follow the example of those who precede them, whether good or bad. So the example set is vitally important.

Church leaders have a great responsibility in this regard (see 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7). Christian leaders are responsible for the legacy they leave behind in life and teaching. Our legacy includes our sense of humility, the way we interact with others, and a holy lifestyle. We will be remembered longest for what we did, not what we said. The condemnation of those who set a bad example will be severe indeed (Mark 9:42).

## **PRAYER**

Our Father in Heaven, continually remind us that we are passing on a heritage, a legacy, a spiritual inheritance. Help us to remember that our lives are the examples of Christ that most people will see. In Jesus' name, amen.

## **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

Find joy in passing along a godly legacy.

## **ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON**

Next quarter we will look to the Gospel of Luke to discover how God calls the church to live out her purpose. The requirements are breathtaking in scope! But we have the power of the Holy Spirit to help us put them into action.

Study next week's lesson **"Called to Believe" Luke 1:8-23.**

## **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

Veronica Jasper

Jesus Is All Ministries

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