

Two More Sons of Israel


 JOSEPH


Your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are (Genesis 48:5).



DEVOTIONAL

Jacob's demand to be buried in the "burying place" of his fathers in Canaan (Genesis 47:29–31) reveals his awareness that he is not going to live to see the fullness of God's promises realized on earth. He knows that he is about to die, a fact confirmed in today's passage, which speaks of Jacob's illness with the same Hebrew term used elsewhere in Scripture for terminal sickness. Joseph, the devoted son that he is, goes to his father on his deathbed, taking his sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him to see their grandfather (48:1–2).

Moses here records Jacob's adoption of his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons (v. 5). This act is best seen as Jacob's ultimate expression of his deep affection for Joseph. The Law later tells us that the firstborn son normally received a double portion of his father's blessing to illustrate his privileged status (Deuteronomy 21:15–17). Jacob's eldest son, Reuben, should have inherited this favor, yet he proved his unworthiness when he slept with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22). For the most part, Jacob's other boys are shady characters (34:25–29), and so he chooses his favorite son, absent from him for more than twenty years, to gain the double blessing. Jacob's eleven other sons father one tribe apiece, but Joseph's inheritance will be reckoned through two tribes named after his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's honor belongs to the entire nation, but these two clans will forever be regarded as special because they are directly linked to the one who saved the world from famine.

Jacob's preface to his adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh sets up the passing on of the patriarchal blessing to all his sons. Recalling his encounter with the Lord at Luz (Bethel, 28:10–22), Jacob summarizes the content of God's word to him — life, land, and offspring (48:3–4) — with verbiage that aligns his blessing with the one given to Abraham (17:1–8) and Isaac (26:1–5). A new era in the history of the Lord's people is about to begin, and Jacob's words reveal his faith that even his death cannot thwart God's intent to bless His elect. The Almighty's promise to Abraham, mediated through Isaac and now Jacob, must come true even if it must be passed down once again.

CORAM DEO (In the Presence of God)

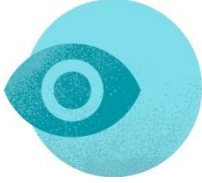
John Calvin says that Joseph's rush to see his father one last time shows he regards it "a greater privilege to be a son of Jacob than to preside over a hundred kingdoms." Joseph saw his father's great faith on his deathbed and knew the blessing of his father's God must be his or all else would be nothing. If the Lord tarries, we too may die before seeing the fullness of God's promise. Will we be like Jacob and trust that God's promise will be fulfilled, even if our death comes first?¹

¹ <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/two-more-sons-israel/>



OPEN IT

1. If you were able to plan your own funeral, what details or elements would you want included in it? Should it be a somber event or a celebration? Formal or casual?
2. Name two things that are on your “bucket list.”



READ IT

Genesis 48; 49:28–33; 50:1–14



EXPLORE IT

3. What causes Joseph to visit his father, at the beginning of chapter 48?
4. Who does Joseph take with him?
5. What does Jacob do with his two grandchildren?
6. Where did Jacob want to be buried?
7. How long did Egypt mourn the loss of Jacob?



APPLY IT

Jacob has lived a long and adventurous life, but now it’s time to get to his bucket list. His health is in serious decline. His eyesight was failing because of his old age (48:10). He is ill in bed (48:1). You can be sure that Jacob had all the aches and pains of old age, and he had been a widower for many decades (48:7), which still leaves an emptiness in his heart. Jacob has declined physically. But despite his frailties, God was at work in Jacob, causing him to peak spiritually! Why do I think that? Well, look at what the text tells us:

- Jacob is quick to recount God’s promises and blessings to him over his long life (48:3–4)
- Jacob desires to bless his adult children and his grandchildren spiritually (48:9, 15–16)
- Jacob acknowledges that God has blessed him far above his expectations (48:11).
- Jacob could not see very well, physically, but he saw, spiritually, the future blessings that God had in store for Joseph’s sons. (v. 17ff).

Do you get the picture? This is not a grandfather who starts acting like a wild teenager and who thinks “I can say and do anything I want to because I’m 147 years old, and no one can tell me what to do!” (Have you met those kinds?) No. Jacob has mellowed and matured in his walk with God. God’s grace has softened his heart, even as his arteries are hardening. Yes, Jacob probably had his share of “senior moments” of forgetfulness, but here he was sharp as a tack when he realized

Joseph's two sons were in the room, because he was all set to give them a well-thought-out blessing...So here's the first thing I want you to put on your bucket list: That the latter portion of your life would be your most fruitful and your sweetest, through the power of the Holy Spirit in you! Just because you are wrinkled doesn't mean that you are ruined! God wants the final chapters of your life to be your most significant, at least to Him.²

8. What is it about the "senior years of life" that can make our impact for God and on others so effective?

9. What types of things can damage opportunities to shine as a senior citizen?

10. Jacob's health was failing and yet he still was able to have a huge impact on his family. How can we follow his footsteps to remain fruitful even as we age and grow weary?

Jacob is about to pass on, to die. (47:28; 48:21). He knows it, and he acknowledges it. He doesn't try to deny it or run from it. He faces it head-on, without fear, without complaining, without bitterness, and without regrets. And what is Jacob's focus of attention as death approaches? Who will get his money? What will people say about him at his funeral service? No.

Jacob's concern is passing on the gospel before he passes on. He wants to hand off the baton of God's covenant promises and blessings to the next generation and to the ones after that. That's the second thing on Jacob's bucket list. And so (picture this) we see him "rallying his strength and sitting up in bed" (48:2) so that he can impart the blessings of the gospel to his son and grandson. Note what Jacob says and does:

First, he wants to pass on the gospel in his death. He purposed to make his death and funeral arrangement a testimony to his faith in the Lord, to stimulate the faith of his descendants. Jacob urged Joseph to promise that he would not bury him in Egypt, but rather back in Canaan. Why? Because this would remind his descendants that Egypt was not their home, until God would bring them to their true "home" to Canaan.³

11. What can a funeral service say about a person's life? What elements can be used to impact both the believing and unbelieving attendees?

12. What is it about the moments surrounding the loss of a loved one that makes the mourners receptive to spiritual things?

13. Jacob teaches his family that they have a home in another land, Canaan. Why is it important for Christians to understand that "this world" is not our home either? What aspects of our lives change when we adopt this mindset?

² <http://mapleglenchurch.org/2015/07/sermon-july-5-2015-genesis-4728-4822-whats-on-your-bucket-list-things-you-should-do-before-you-die/>

³ *ibid*

Jacob wants to pass on the gospel in his declaration. Having been assured of his request, Jacob bowed in worship on the head of his staff (47:31) and then proceeded to bless Joseph's sons. It is this incident which the writer to the Hebrews cites as evidence of the faith of Jacob: "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff." (Hebrews 11:21).

Note also how Jacob testifies to God's past and present faithfulness to His promises in 48:3, regarding blessing Jacob, making him fruitful, and increasing his number. Then in v. 4, Jacob witnesses to his sons by affirming that the same God will also bring their people one day into the Promised Land.

One possible application: Have you made a record of God's blessings and faithfulness to you, over the decades of your life? I encourage you to write them down, to make a scrapbook, to record them in some fashion... and then make sure it is passed on and read or viewed. It will be a witness to the unbelievers and an encouragement to the saints. Imagine 50 or 100 years from now, one of your grandchildren or great-great grandchildren discovering and reading your testimony of how God worked in your life!⁴

14. Why is it so important for parents and grandparents to speak openly and honestly about their faith?

15. When have you seen the faith of a parent or grandparent shape the lives of another generation?

16. Joseph's children knew only the ways and customs of Egypt, and the strong temptation to follow in Egypt's footsteps was real. How can parents or grandparents have a spiritual impact amid such temptations that face the next generation?

Jacob now blesses the two boys. According to the custom of the time, the primary blessing should have gone to the older son—Manasseh. But that's not how it works out. When Joseph brings the two boys forward, he puts Manasseh in front of Jacob's right hand and Ephraim in front of his left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms, placing his right hand on Ephraim and his left hand on Manasseh. Thus, the younger son got the primary blessing and the older son got the lesser blessing.

On one level, this is the sovereignty of God at work. He had chosen Ephraim over Manasseh and although Joseph protested, he could not change the plan of God. On another level, Jacob the younger son is following a pattern of his life. He the younger had been chosen over Esau the older. Later on he preferred the younger Rachel to the older Leah. Now he blesses the younger over the older.

Some of us who are younger sons and daughters can draw great encouragement from this story. Many times, the firstborn children are favored and children that come later are overlooked. But the Bible is full of hope for younger children. Isaac was a younger child. So was Jacob. So was Joseph. So was Moses. So was Gideon. So was David. In blessing the younger over the older, Jacob teaches us that God is no respecter of persons. He exalts those who honor him regardless of their background or their birth order. **Very often it is through the "overlooked" people of the world that God does his greatest work.**⁵

17. How does the statement above regarding the blessing of Jacob's grandsons give you hope when it comes to God's plans for you? How does it motivate you to serve God in greater ways?

⁴ ibid

⁵ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found at <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-11-22-How-a-Good-Man-Dies/>

Joseph was a godly man. His father's death was not unexpected. Yet when Jacob died, Joseph fell on his father's face and wept (50:1). Then he observed 70 days of mourning (50:3), plus seven more days after the funeral procession arrived at the borders of Canaan. There is no hint in the text that Joseph was unspiritual or excessive in his grief. Although it is possible to grieve excessively, the Bible teaches that normal grief is a proper human emotion and that tears are the normal response in grief. Jesus Christ entered into Mary and Martha's grief by weeping at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11:33, 35).

In fact, God the Holy Spirit is capable of grief, as seen in the admonition, "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (Ephesians 4:30). One of the most difficult commandments God has given anybody was when He told the prophet Ezekiel that He was going to take his wife and, as a sign to the disobedient nation, he was not allowed to mourn outwardly or weep for her (Ezekiel 24:16–17). But that was clearly an exception.

Grief is normal and proper when we lose loved ones in death. You're not more spiritual if you don't grieve.⁶

18. Why is it important that we grieve the loss of loved ones? What does grieving look like? When does grief become excessive?

19. Joseph followed and fulfilled the wishes of his father with regard to Jacob's burial. Why is it important that children seek to fulfill their parents' final wishes?

20. All of Egypt wept at the loss of Jacob; this speaks of the great honor and respect that Joseph's family had in a secular culture. What things can we do to create a lasting legacy among the unbelievers around us so that we might be missed when we are gone?

Let me close by asking a simple question: **Are you ready to die?**

John Henry Newman said, "Fear not that your life should come to an end, but rather that it shall never have a beginning." Christian, are you ready to die? Believer in Jesus, are you ready to die?

Have you lived this week so that if today were the day, you wouldn't have to look back with remorse and regret?

But what if you don't know Jesus? You aren't ready to die even if you think you are. No one is ready to die until they know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Sometimes people says, "Life begins at 40." How wrong they are. Life begins at Calvary. Life begins the moment you put your trust in Jesus Christ. Life begins at the cross when you bow the knee and say, "Thank you, Lord Jesus, for dying for me." Until you come to Christ your life has no beginning. You have existence but you don't have life.

Life begins the moment you say "Yes" to the Lord Jesus. I urge you to come to him so that no matter how long you live—one more day, one more week, one more month, one more year, or 50 more years—you will be ready to die when the moment finally comes.⁷

21. How do we begin to prepare ourselves for our death, all the while living our lives to the fullest for Christ?

⁶ Sermon by Steve Cole found at <http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=99225162257480>

⁷ Sermon by Ray Pritchard found at <http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1992-11-22-How-a-Good-Man-Dies/>