

Israel Gave the Greater Blessing to the Younger

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the family of Abraham did not always follow the culture of their day and give the blessing to the oldest son. In our topic today, we will see that Israel gave a greater blessing to the younger son of Joseph.

Genesis 48:14-16 says, “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. 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.’” We mentioned, in the last topic, that Israel knew which of the two sons of Joseph he wanted to receive the greater blessing. Joseph was guiding his right hand toward the older son, Manasseh. Here, we see that Israel crossed his hands and laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim who was the younger of the two sons. Then, he placed his left hand on the head of Manasseh. The word translated “knowingly” means the *thinking through of a complex group of thoughts so that a wise decision is made*. Israel realized that Joseph was trying to guide his right hand to the oldest son, so Israel based his decision to place his right hand on the head of Ephraim because God was going to make his descendants greater in the future.

With his hands on the heads of the two sons of Joseph, Israel then gave the blessing to Joseph. In that blessing, he blessed both Joseph and his two sons. This blessing came from the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. They had both walked faithfully before the Lord during their lives. Israel first spoke of the fact that God had met his physical needs throughout his life. He said that God had fed him throughout his life, right down to the present day. Then, Israel spoke of the fact that God had also met his spiritual needs. The word translated “Angel” means a *messenger*. It can be used to speak of a human messenger, a superhuman messenger, or the Angel of the Lord (which was an Old Testament appearance of Christ). By this statement, Israel recognized that it was the Angel of the Lord who had redeemed him from all evil. The word translated “redeemed” is used in many places to speak of the Lord who redeems. Psalm 19:14 says, “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my strength and my Redeemer.” Then, Isaiah 63:16 says, “Doubtless You *are* our Father, though Abraham was ignorant of us, and Israel does not acknowledge us. You, O LORD, *are* our Father; Our Redeemer from Everlasting *is* Your name.” This verse in Genesis is the first time where we are told that God will be our Redeemer in the Old Testament, but it was mentioned many more times through the Old Testament.

In his blessing, Israel went on to say that his name, as well as the names of Abraham and Isaac, would be upon the two sons of Joseph. This showed that Joseph was the one who received the double blessing, because each of his sons would be a tribe in the nation of Israel. As a part of the blessing of Joseph and his sons, Israel said that they would grow into a multitude. Israel recognized that the One who redeemed him was also the One who would cause the descendants of Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim to grow into a great multitude. The faithfulness of Joseph, throughout his life, would be blessed by the Lord who would cause his descendants to become a very large multitude.

Joseph had seen what his father had done when he crossed his hands to give the blessing. Genesis 48:17-19 says, “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. And Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this *one is* the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.’ 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.’” We see that Joseph was grieved when he saw that Israel had placed his right hand on the head of Ephraim and tried to move his hand.

Joseph thought that Israel had done what he had done because of his poor eyesight. For that reason, he tried to move the right hand from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. While he was trying to move the right hand, he told his father that Ephraim was not the firstborn. The cultures of that day usually blessed the firstborn. We see that many times, in the history of Israel, God made it clear that He sees things differently than man sees things. The very fact that Israel was blessing Joseph, and both of his sons, was a clear departure from the customs of the nations in that area. However, we see that the Lord continued to place His blessing on others who were not the firstborn. In 1 Samuel 16:6-7, we read, “So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, ‘Surely the Lord’s anointed *is* before Him!’ But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For *the Lord does not see* as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” In this situation, the Lord chose the eighth and youngest son of Jesse to replace Saul and be the future king of Israel. David was chosen to be the future king because the Lord looks on the heart, and David had a heart for God.

Israel then told Joseph that he knew Ephraim was not the oldest son. He said that Manasseh, the oldest son, would also become one of the tribes of Israel. In fact, he would experience great blessing as well, because God would cause him to also become a great people. However, the younger son, and his descendants, would be greater than the older son and his descendants. The Lord led Israel to make this prophecy about the two sons of Joseph because the Lord looks at the heart, while the nations looked at the birth order. Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘For 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.’” The Lord revealed His

plan for the future of the tribe of Ephraim through this prophecy by Israel. God showed Israel that the descendants of Ephraim would become a multitude of nations.

Genesis 48:20-22 says, “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. 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. 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.’” We see that this blessing included Joseph and both of his sons. Jacob said the nation of Israel would use the names of the two sons of Joseph when they gave a blessing to others. He said the emphasis would be on the way the Lord was blessing the two sons of Joseph. However, the way that Jacob worded the statement, he placed Ephraim before Manasseh. That meant that Ephraim would become a leader among the tribes of Israel. In fact, the last prophecy in the Old Testament, about Ephraim, spoke about the way the Lord will bless them in the future. Zechariah 10:6-7 says, “‘I will strengthen the house of Judah, and I will save the house of Joseph. I will bring them back, because I have mercy on them. They shall be as though I had not cast them aside; for I *am* the LORD their God, and I will hear them. *Those of Ephraim* shall be like a mighty man, and their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see *it* and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the LORD.”

Israel then went on to tell Joseph what was going to happen and what had happened during the time Joseph was in Egypt before his family came to Egypt. First, Israel said, “Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.” Israel realized he did not have long to live. However, that did not bring fear to his life, because He had learned to trust God in all things. Instead of talking about his death, Israel gave a wonderful promise about the future. He told Joseph that the Lord was going to work in the nation of Israel and bring them back to the land of Canaan. The Lord had told Israel, in Genesis 46:2-4, “Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob!’ And he said, ‘Here I am.’ So He said, ‘I *am* God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up *again*; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.’” Israel had been given a promise by God that the Lord would bring his descendants out of the land of Egypt. Israel could rejoice in that fact, because he knew the Lord would do exactly as He promised.

Israel then told Joseph that he would have the double inheritance in the land of Canaan when his descendants returned to the land of Canaan. Then, Israel told Joseph about a victory he had experienced during the time Joseph was in the land of Egypt. Israel said he had defeated the Amorites with his sword and bow during that time. This is not mentioned in any other place in the Bible, but it does speak of the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise that God had made originally to Abraham. During the more than four hundred years the descendants of Israel would be in Egypt, the Amorites grew strong again and they had to be defeated again when the nation of Israel entered into the

land. However, the Lord had earlier given Israel victory, even though Israel and his family were very small in number. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the faith of Israel had grown after the Lord told him that his name would no longer be Jacob but he would be called Israel. The Lord spoke about what he would become, not what he was at that time. Israel provides a key example of the fact that our faith will grow as we learn to walk with the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain this important lesson.