

RUF Bible Study – The Gospel in Genesis  
Doug Serven, RUF Campus Minister<sup>1</sup>  
March 9, 2005  
Genesis 48 – Final Blessings Part One<sup>2</sup>

*By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.  
Hebrews 11:21*

Genesis 48:13-22 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. 14 And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). 15 And he blessed Joseph and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since 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. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."

It's interesting in the famous Hebrews 11 faith chapter that the author mentions Genesis 48 and 49 as the thing Jacob does to show his faith. He blesses his sons in his old age. Not marrying Leah and Rachel. Not wrestling with the angel. Not going out to meet Esau. Not traveling to Egypt to see his lost son. But speaking words to his sons on their deathbed. That is what gets the publicity for Jacob. I'd hazard a guess that we wouldn't have thought to put that. But there are two chapters here devoted to Jacob's parting words. No other patriarch has gotten this much time and space when he died. Most are glossed over with only a few sentences. But Jacobs spends two chapters, which we'll look at separately, in order to get his house in order and speak to his sons.

Joseph gets news that his father, who is now 147 years old, has become ill. Thinking that this may be it, he takes his two sons, possibly his only two sons at the time, to see their grandfather, expecting for them to get a blessing. Manasseh is oldest and Ephraim is youngest, but they are both approximately twenty. Young men.

They enter the room, and Jacob gathers himself to sit up in bed. Jacob makes a speech and then proceeds to adopt Joseph's two sons as his own. After this, he blesses Joseph and the two sons. He finishes with a few words of instruction about what needs to happen when he dies.

#### *Jacob's testimony*

Jacob's testimony begins and ends with God. As he prepares to adopt these two grandchildren as his own sons, he begins by thinking of his own life and how God has been faithful to him. We can see his thankfulness for past blessings when he says, *God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me.* Luz is Bethel, which means the House of God, where Jacob saw the angels coming down from heaven to be near to him. God Almighty is a translation of the name of God, *El Shaddai*. This perspective of El Shaddai keeps Jacob from thinking of himself chiefly responsible for his successes. He had had successes to be sure, but he gives the credit to God and His faithfulness, the one who fulfilled the promise delivered at Bethel that he would be fruitful and multiply and be made into a great nation. This perspective keeps him from being bitter about those who have wronged him and not dwelling on missed chances.

None of us want to be Uncle Rico (from the movie "Napoleon Dynamite"), who desperately wanted to relive his hypothetical glory days of high school. If only the coach had put him in, his whole life would have different. Jacob had done plenty of wrong things and had been wronged a good number of times. If only he hadn't tricked his father and had to run away. If only Laban hadn't given him Leah instead of Rachel. If only he'd recognized it before it was too late. If only his sons hadn't killed those people in Shechem. If only his sons hadn't sold Joseph into slavery. But God's presence gives strong consolation for life's sorrows. It doesn't erase them, but it eases them.

On our anniversary trip to New Mexico, I asked Julie one thing she would have done differently and one thing she wishes I would have done differently. She has some regrets about the way we did our wedding (especially the brutal bridesmaids dresses. Sorry, ladies who had to wear them.), but for the most part had trouble coming up with much. I thought about the moves we made,

---

<sup>1</sup> © Doug Serven, 2005 You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce and distribute this material in any format provided that you do not alter the wording in any way, you do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction, and you do not make more than 500 physical copies. For web posting, a link to this document on our website is preferred. Any exceptions to the above must be explicitly approved by Doug Serven.

Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: By Doug Serven, © Doug Serven, 2004, website: [www.ouruf.org](http://www.ouruf.org).

<sup>2</sup> Sources: Waltke, Kidner, Wenham, Alter, Calvin, Gibson and DeGraaf.

which I mentioned last time, in the 12 months from June 1996 to June 1997. We moved from Stillwater, Oklahoma, to Colorado Springs to Lincoln, Nebraska, to St. Louis to go to Covenant Seminary.

I feel just awful about the strain that put on Julie and our marriage and our family. We only lived in Lincoln, Nebraska for nine months, so it seems on the surface to be an incredible mistake. But... that is where we joined a really good church – Covenant Presbyterian Church (which became Zion PCA). Ruth and Cal (who was born in Lincoln in November) were baptized there. I was able to figure some things out about myself and realize that I didn't want to be where I was and was scared to go to seminary. I was able to take both Greek and Hebrew from a man, Dr. Vern Steiner, on Saturday mornings for that whole year, the result of which meant I saved a ton of time and money in Greek class (testing out of four of the six hours) and was ahead of the game (at least marginally) when I got to Hebrew. I met many times with the pastor of the church, Stu Kerns, at the Hinky Dinky for breakfast, and he helped me process some things. The church was incredibly generous to support us through seminary with a few hundred dollars a month. I spent time with John Hatfield, the director of The Navigators there, who generously listened to me and loved me even though I was a mess and wasn't going to be around for long.... The list could go on.

So do I regret Lincoln, Nebraska.? On the surface, Yes. But at a deeper level the answer has to be a resounding "No." Both Julie and I would say that it was a very important year in our lives and that God was with us.

Jacob goes over his life, thinking of all that happened in a similar manner. He screwed up numerous times. He had years and years of hardship. He must have wondered what was going on. But here he is with his family, and he is strengthened to do what he needed to do in the present. Though he misses Rachel still, a tender moment where he must be looking into the face of his son by her and his grandsons and seeing Rachel in them, he shows tremendous affection and has been changed through his life.

He's been changed from Jacob, the deceiver, into Israel, the father of the church. Remember Gen. 32:27-28? *And he said to him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Jacob." Then he said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven with God and prevailed."*

Israel means "He strives with God" or "God strives." "Strives" isn't the most common word these days. Strive. Strived. Have striven. Do you consider faith to be struggling with God? Are you wrestling with Him over issues in your life? Are you asking Him questions, wondering what He's doing, trying to see what He's saying? Are you willing to be mad at God? Are you willing to weep before Him if He controls you? Jacob was blessed just for this battle. He was a sinful man, but his faith made him continually engaging with God, something that wasn't always constant but was always a battle. Israel had striven with God, and God had conquered him. To God be the glory.

### ***Jacob's adoption***

Jacob then says what he is going to do. *And now your two sons, who were born to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are.* The rest of Joseph's subsequent children won't be adopted as Jacob's but here we are told that these two will be accounted as Jacob's own. "Jacob's authority to legitimate Joseph's two sons as numbered among his twelve sons comes from the theophanies given especially to him. Joseph, having never experienced such theophanies, does not have this authority."<sup>3</sup>

Jacob chooses Joseph's two sons out of his 52 grandsons (46:7-27), adopts them as his own sons and blesses them; this places them on equal status as their uncles (and strangely, Joseph's sons become reckoned as his brothers). This adoption explains what we read later on in Numbers especially about the division of the land. In one sense there are now thirteen tribes for Israel since Joseph is considered gone and Ephraim and Manasseh take his place. But there are still twelve allotments because Levi doesn't have the same type of distribution since it is the tribe of priests. So in another way there are still twelve. We see how and why this takes place here in this passage.

This adoption also serves to give Joseph a double share of Jacob's inheritance. This shows that Joseph has moved to the "head of the line" in one category – the double share due the oldest son. But he doesn't get the leadership of the family – that goes to Judah.

Joseph was excited about this too, and it seems as if he was somehow expecting it. He wants his sons to be blessed by Jacob. "Joseph consecrates his sons of an Egyptian mother to the God of Israel and his covenant people. By bringing his sons to Jacob for this adoption ritual, he corrects any misunderstanding of their names to mean that he either forgot his family (so Manasseh) or that he hoped to be fruitful in the land of Egypt (so Ephraim)."<sup>4</sup>

Several of the things that happen are a part of this adoptions ceremony. They come to the bed and sit at Jacob's knees.<sup>5</sup> He shows them familial affection afterwards. It appears as if there is the verbiage of an official ceremony when Jacob asks, "*Who are these?*" which is similar to "What name is given this child?" for baptism. The pastor knows, but is asking so it can be stated to everyone present and as a part of making it all official. Joseph doesn't name them because Jacob already knows. He says that these children are God's gift to him.<sup>6</sup>

Things get a little confusing here, and it seems that the narrator has conflated the story to save some of the talking and drama so it doesn't interrupt the flow of the story. The narrator inserts a sentence about Jacob's eyesight, which sets us up for what is about to happen. Joseph brings the sons to Jacob. Jacob says how wonderful it is to be able to be here and to do this. Then the adoption phase is over and we get to the blessings.

---

<sup>3</sup> Waltke, 596

<sup>4</sup> Waltke, 595

<sup>5</sup> Possibly symbolizing a new birth

<sup>6</sup> I submit that our culture does not view children in this way.

Joseph “stage manages” the boys, positioning them how he expects them to get the blessing, with Manasseh, the oldest, first. These were “second generation” Hebrew/Egyptian boys (their mother was Egyptian). They had never set foot in Canaan and had only known Egypt. Here is an old man blessing them with ancient Hebrew shepherd blessings. You have to wonder what they were thinking, and we get nothing from the text at all.

Jacob here acts like both prophet and priest. He speaks into their lives, God’s Word of prophecy, and he blesses as a priest. But Jacob again switches the blessing, giving the greater one to Ephraim over Manasseh.

We have to assume that Jacob was thinking of the blessing he had received from his father. Remember that one? Isaac had blessed the younger, but had been tricked into doing so. Jacob was determined not to repeat this clandestine act, but he was also determined to repeat the reversal. God had spoken and Jacob wasn’t going to argue with God on this one. “If Isaac’s unintended blessing was effective, how much more so the deliberate decision by Jacob to put Ephraim before Manasseh.”<sup>7</sup>

Joseph is upset and says something. “Disturbed” implies powerful anger, but Joseph curbs his feelings while still insisting on the natural order of things. Jacob rejects Joseph’s protests, confirming all the more the validity of the blessings. He says, “I know, my son.” Whereas Isaac hadn’t known what he was doing because of his poor eyesight and tricky wife and son, Jacob, one of the actors in that very play, *knows*, despite not being able to see, that he is following God’s will in this change.

And again we see that God is sovereign. What Jacob says will happen, happens. In this chapter and in chapter 49.

And again we see that there is hope for the younger son. It’s an incredible pattern: Abel, Isaac, Jacob, Peres over Zerah, Joseph, Ephraim, Moses, Gideon, David.

And again we see grace. Ephraim had done nothing to deserve this. He was just standing there.

### ***Jacob’s blessings***

When Jacob blesses now three sons, we take a look at what he says, and try to draw out application for our own lives.

Jacob says, *the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day.*

It’s not hard to think of Psalm 23 and John 10. The Lord is my shepherd. “The first of the two epithets is an intimate royal metaphor for God that signifies his provision, restoration, and protection. The aged shepherd acknowledges God’s special shepherding of his life.”<sup>8</sup>

The Scottish pastor Robert Bruce (1554-1631) took over Edinburgh’s St. Giles church when John Knox died. Another man, Alexander Henderson (1583-1646) didn’t like the crazy Presbyterians at all and was a definite Anglican man in every way. These were difficult times between these two factions in Scotland. One day, Henderson decided to go and actually listen to Bruce preach, since he’d only heard about him and hadn’t ever heard him. But he didn’t want to be seen in the church in any way. So he snuck in. He not only snuck in, but he hid out in a little alcove underneath a table off to the side.

Robert Bruce’s text that day was John 10:1, “*Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in another way, that man is a thief and a robber.*” The facts spoke for themselves. Henderson’s spiritual condition, he felt and wrote later, was betrayed by his physical condition. He became a follower of the shepherd that day.

Do you know Jesus Christ as your shepherd? He says that His sheep know and follow His voice. Do you?

Jacob also calls God, *the angel, who has redeemed me from all evil.* “The second epithet focuses on God’s protection. Heretofore an angel has appeared in crises. Jacob has learned the reality of God’s presence through experience.”<sup>9</sup> Of course we remember Jacob seeing the angels in Bethel and his wrestling with the angel of the Lord before he met Esau. This angel, this vision of Jesus, Jacob says *redeemed* him from all evil. I believe this is the first time this word is used in the Bible. God redeems. He provides salvation. He saves us. Through hardship. Using hardship and even evil. Have you been redeemed? Can you say that Jesus has saved you from all evil, that He has redeemed you?

Jacob next says, *Let them grow into a multitude.* “Jacob, after recapitulating the story of his personal providence in the first line of the blessing poem, invokes the benediction of the patriarchal line, and then, going back still further in the biblical history, the promise, or injunction, of fertility in the Creation story.”<sup>10</sup> We talked about this in the last passage, the wonderment of how slow this growth has been, yet how firm the conviction that it would happen eventually has resided in these patriarchs.

And guess what? It comes true. “The combined number of males in Ephraim and Manasseh increases from 72,700 (Num. 1:32-35) in the second year after the Exodus to 85,200 forty years later (Num. 26:28-37). By contrast, the combined populations of Reuben and Simeon during the same period of time decreases from 105,800 to 65,930. The tribes of Joseph become the paradigm of spectacular increase.”<sup>11</sup>

Remember that this is the church in action. The living church. Do we pray for its increase? Do we trust that it will happen? Do we claim the promises of the gospels for the nations by faith? Do we engage with our friends and neighbors?

A few more words from Jacob that are for us as well. At the very end of this chapter, Jacob says *Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.* Jacob finishes with telling Joseph to bury him in

---

<sup>7</sup> Wenham, 465

<sup>8</sup> Waltke, 599

<sup>9</sup> Waltke, 599

<sup>10</sup> Alter, 289

<sup>11</sup> Waltke, 600

Canaan, and remembers that he owns some land over there that he wants Joseph to have. This could be a token of his affection for Joseph, or it could be a way to remind Joseph of where he is from. We are left to guess.<sup>12</sup>

Jacob insists on remembering God's presence. Why? Because he has felt it so many times in the past and he feels the weight of it now for him and for his family.

God said, "*I am with you*" in Gen. 28:15.

"Everyone should be able at least to start at this point of Jacob's testimony. If you are Christ's and are serious about following him as your Lord, then know that he is with you, regardless of what your other circumstances may be. If you are not Christ's, then come to him. Embrace him as your Savior."<sup>13</sup>

Matthew 28:20 - And behold, ***I am with you*** always, to the end of the age

John 13:33 - Little children, yet a little while ***I am with you***. You will seek me, and just as I said to the Jews, so now I also say to you, 'Where I am going you cannot come.'

Isaiah 41:10 - fear not, for ***I am with you***; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.

Jeremiah 30:10 - "Then fear not, O Jacob my servant, declares the Lord, nor be dismayed, O Israel; for behold, I will save you from far away, and your offspring from the land of their captivity. Jacob shall return and have quiet and ease, and none shall make him afraid. 11 For ***I am with you*** to save you, declares the Lord; I will make a full end of all the nations among whom I scattered you, but of you I will not make a full end. I will discipline you in just measure, and I will by no means leave you unpunished.

God said, "*I will be with you*" in Gen 31:3.

"Nothing ever comes into our lives that Jesus Christ has not foreseen. Nothing will ever happen to us that he does not control."<sup>14</sup>

Not only at the end of our lives, but as we pass from one stage to another. In just two months, we'll have a posse of seniors up here giving testimony of God's work in their lives. Perhaps some of them will give evidence by saying "God has been with me and God is with me." And we will seek to bless them by saying, "God will be with you." As you get a job, as you go to graduate school, as you get married and have children, buy a house, move away. As you experience heartache too – rejection, loss, and sorrow. We have to know this for ourselves and take hold of it so it can change us.

Jacob said "*God... has been with me.*" in Gen. 31:5, 35:3.

God had done what he had said – he had been with him. Can you give a testimony like that, even if you have only been a Christian for a short time? God was with Jacob despite his faults and failures. Look at Peter walking on the water – was Jesus with him? Jesus was the closest to him when he was sinking. Suddenly Jesus was right next to him, drawing him out of the water and into the boat.

Charles Spurgeon writes: "If you trust in God, this shall be your verdict at the close of life. When you come to die you shall look back upon a life which has not been without its trials and difficulties, but you shall bless God for it all; and if there is any one thing in life for which you will have to praise God more than for another, it will probably be that very event which seems darkest to you.

Did God ever do a better thing for Jacob than when we took Joseph away and sent him to Egypt to preserve the whole family alive? It was the severest trial of the poor man's career, and yet the brightest blessing after all... Inside that hard-shelled nut there is the sweetest kernel that you have tasted. Rest assured of that. Your father's rumbling wagons have woke you out of sleep and you are frightened at them; but they are loaded with ingots of gold. You have never been so rich as you will be after your great trouble shall have passed away."<sup>15</sup>

And now Jacob says "*God will be with you*" in Gen. 48:21

"At the end of life each of us should be able to look back on years of walking with God and say that God has indeed been with us, as he promised to be. And we should be able to share that hope with others."<sup>16</sup>

Jacob knows that God will be with him. But he is saying that God will be with *them*. This is the blessing, the passing on of experience, the assurance that all will be well no matter what happens. We are to speak these words to others. Do we tell the seniors, here at RUF or any other place, God will be with you? Do you say this to your family and friends?

God will be with you tonight. With your thoughts. With your sadness and joy. With your studies. With your drinking and smoking. With you and your girlfriend. With your sleep. With your dreams. God will be with you tomorrow in all that you do.

This can give us tremendous comfort or incredible angst. I pray that you will know Him who is with you. God will be with you.

---

<sup>12</sup>ESV translates *Shechem* 'ahad as "one mountain slope." It could mean "portion" or "Shechem" or Alter says he thinks it means "with single intent" on analogy to Zephaniah 3:9, "where it is used adverbially in the idiomatic sense made clear by the immediate context... This is, then, an expression that indicates concerted, unwavering intention and execution, and as such is perfectly appropriate to the legal pronouncement of legacy by Jacob in which it appears." Altar, 291

<sup>13</sup>Boice, 1171

<sup>14</sup>Boice, 1172

<sup>15</sup>Spurgeon, "Four Choice Sentences" in *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit*, vol. 27, 1882, reprint London: Banner of Truth, 1971, 647; found in Boice, 1173.

<sup>16</sup>Boice, 1170