

Dying and Destinies Gen 48-49

I. Promise

A. *47:28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years. 29 And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh, and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers; carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." 31 And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.*

II. Personal Proclamation

A. *48:1 After this Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill"; so he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you"; then Israel summoned his strength, and sat up in bed. 3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' 5 And now 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. 6 And the offspring born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel to my sorrow died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."*

III. Patriarchal Blessings

A. *8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, I pray you, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; and lo, God has let me see your children also." 12 Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 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 upon the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has led me all my life long to this day, 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and*

in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

1. This incident explains why there was no tribe known as Joseph among the twelve.
 2. In effect, Joseph is blessed and receives a heritage through his sons.
 3. It also explains Ephraim's dominance over his older brother Manasseh. During the great part of Israelite history Ephraim was the dominant and most important tribe.
 4. Though subordinate to Ephraim, Manasseh remained dominant over the tribes too. This required explanation since they were not technically sons of Jacob. This story provides that explanation.
- B. In taking Ephraim and Manasseh on his knees, Jacob adopts them. This leads to a question however. Since he accepts them into the family and later gives them a heritage (48:20) does this not make the number of tribes add up to 14 rather than 12 (Joseph plus his two sons)? Two points can be made to explain there still being twelve tribes:
1. Ephraim and Manasseh are blessed and given a heritage in place of Joseph. Joseph is blessed through his sons. But this still leaves the number at 13.
 2. The further reduction is explained in Jacob's curses of Simeon and Levi.¹ The tribes of Simeon and Levi are in effect dispersed among the other tribes and live in their lands. Simeon tended to be absorbed into the tribe of Judah both in territory and name. Levi became the priestly class, living among all the tribes and, instead of land received the tithe as shall be worked out in the desert after the golden calf incident.

IV. Puzzlement

- A. ***17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; and he took 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 first-born; put your right hand upon 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 descendants 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'; and thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.***
- B. Joseph is obviously puzzled and perturbed that Jacob has favored the younger of the two.
- C. Why exactly Jacob does this is not clear. Perhaps he recalls his own second born status?
- D. Yet one point has become clear, this is a consistent pattern thus far in Genesis.

¹They were cursed as a result of leading the atrocity committed against the city of Shechem as revenge for the rape of Dinah their sister. Recall they committed this atrocity even after the men of that town agreed to peace terms and after they were circumcised.

Almost as if God is saying, "What ever emphasis humans put on status, I do not regard it. I bless who I will."

1. Abel is favored over Cain
2. Isaac is favored over Ishmael
3. Jacob is favored over Esau
4. Ephraim is favored over Manasseh
5. More example of this will be seen in books to come, culminating with David the youngest favored over all his brothers

V. Patrimony

A. ***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 which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."***

B. This patrimony will actually accrue to Joseph's sons as we have said.

VI. Prophecies

A. ***49:1 Then Jacob called his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come. 2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father."***

B. ***3 REUBEN, you are my first-born, my might, and the first fruits of my strength, pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it -- you went up to my couch!***

1. Reuben should have inherited first born blessings but he forfeited it due to the crime he committed in Gen 35:22
 - a. Gen 35:22 *While Israel was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.*
2. The tribe of Reuben was important for a time but eventually declined and disappeared

C. ***5 SIMEON AND LEVI are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.***

1. We have already discussed, they are condemned for their heinous crime and they become dispersed among the 12 tribes.
2. Simeon is absorbed into Judah
3. Levi however is able to recoup his blessing, not in land but in tithes and priestly service.
 - a. Deut 33:8 *About Levi he said: "Your Thummim and Urim belong to the man you favored. You tested him at Massah; you contended with him at the waters of Meribah. He said of his father and*

mother; 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant. He teaches your precepts to Jacob and your law to Israel. He offers incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar. Bless all his skills, O LORD, and be pleased with the work of his hands. Smite the loins of those who rise up against him; strike his foes till they rise no more."

D. 8 JUDAH, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness; who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. 11 Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes; 12 his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

1. Here is the first son to be blessed!
2. Judah indeed would come into prominence especially under the Kingdom of David and would survive after the loss of the north in 721 BC
3. From Judah too would come forth the Messiah as prophesied in this text. We can discuss this in class

E. 13 ZEBULUN shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon.

1. Zebulun would have economic blessings due to his fortunate locale on shipping routes and along the coast.

F. 14 ISSACHAR is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds; 15 he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave at forced labor.

1. Issachar inherited fertile lands and became a farmer.
2. Yet the nomadic spirit of early Israel regarded farming as a kind of slavery. Yes he has fertile lands, but he has to stay put to farm, curses!
3. Another explanation is the dominance of the Phoenicians near Sidon.

G. 16 DAN shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. 18 I wait for thy salvation, O LORD.

1. During the period of the Judges Dan would have to fight for survival but would eventually gain a favorable position where it could dominate the trade routes.

H. 19 Raiders shall raid GAD, but he shall raid at their heels.

1. The tribe of Gad settled in transjordan where they struggled greatly with nomadic tribes that raided frequently. They in return often attacked them. (Cf. Judges 10-11; Chr 5:18-22)

- I. 20 ASHER'S food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.**
1. Asher inherited a rich farmland in the northern region of Galilee.
- J. 21 NAPHTALI is a hind let loose, that bears comely fawns.**
1. The text in the Hebrew is confused and what precisely is said here is not certain.
- K. 22 JOSEPH is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers fiercely attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him sorely; 24 yet his bow remained unmoved, his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel), 25 by the God of your father who will help you, by God Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 26 The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers.**
1. Ephraim and Manasseh were the strongest, most influential of the tribes. This blessing is reflected here in Jacob's words
 2. Properly speaking these are the only words of blessing conveyed in Jacob's parting words. Favoritism to the end?
- L. 27 BENJAMIN is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at even dividing the spoil."**
1. The tribe of Benjamin was noted for its warlike qualities.
- M. 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.**

VII. Prescription

- A. 29 Then he charged them, and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah-- 32 the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites."**
1. Recall the blessings of God are centered in the promised land.
 2. Abraham strayed, Isaac edged away, Jacob strayed. Now he knows, even though sent here by God, the blessings are to be fulfilled in Canaan.
 3. An interesting irony. The cave at *Machpelah* would bury him alongside Leah, not Rachel.

VIII. Passing - 33 *When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.*

A. Gathered to his people can be a foreshadowing of Heaven but at this point, Israel would have had little understanding of an afterlife. Hence the phrase means more to us than to the first readers of this text.