Refine Women's Ministry

Genesis 49 Jacob's Dozen: Joseph: Manasseh and Ephraim

Lesson 10: April 19, 2020 by Kim Peelen

Oh, give ear, Shepherd of Israel, You who lead Joseph like a flock; You who are enthroned above *the cherubim, shine forth! 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh, stir up Your power And come to save us! 3 O God, restore us And cause Your face to shine* upon us, *and we will be saved*. Psalm 80:1-3

As Jacob continues to bless his twelve sons, he must have anticipated greatly what God would bestow on his youngest two sons – Joseph and Benjamin - offspring of his true love, his beloved Rachel whom he had worked so many years to win. His treasured wife who for years anticipates having children but none arrive, who endures watching her sister Leah easily bear sons – six of her own and then two more by her maid Zilpah – who desperately offers her maid Bilhah to have sons in her place, but continually begs God to heed her cry to bear her own children. Genesis 30:22-24 describes His answer: *Then God remembered Rachel, and God gave heed to her and opened her womb. 23 So she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." 24 She named him* ***Joseph****, saying, "May the LORD give me another son."* Joseph means, 'may he add', so even as Rachel welcomes her first child of her own flesh and blood, she expresses her faith that God will give her another.

Joseph's blessing in Genesis 49: 22-26 is his longest and includes three parts – Fruitfulness of Joseph's life, Source of Joseph's strength, and Blessings of Joseph's descendants.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring;* Its *branches run over a wall.
"The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot* at him *and harassed him;
But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile,

From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you* With *blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

"The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

Fruitfulness of Joseph's Life

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its *branches run over a wall.*
"The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him *and harassed him;*
But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile,

The imagery clearly expresses the bountiful produce of Joseph with his bough amply watered by a spring so it grows so vigorously it covers a wall. The bough is not just greenery, but produces its expected fruit abundantly. Jacob borrows the words of Joseph from Genesis 41:52 when he names his second son Ephraim: *"God has made me fruitful in*

the land of my affliction." Joseph's life has been marked by much affliction, which his father recounts in his next phrase, ***the archers bitterly attacked him, And shot* at him *and harassed him.*** How much his father knew of the brothers' involvement of Joseph's slavery in Egypt is not certain, but he vividly describes the fiery darts of hatred and temptation aimed at Joseph from many sources, with the most painful likely coming from the hands of his own brothers. However, Joseph bore his afflictions and burdens steadfastly and did not lose faith, ***but his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile.*** In fact, the trials contribute to making Joseph more fruitful, turning the horrible into the honorable as his amazing life reveals in his extensive biography recorded in Genesis 37 – 50.

Joseph proved faithful in small things – obeying his father's instruction to check on his brothers in the pastures, working diligently and honestly as a slave and a prisoner, offering his help to despondent fellow-prisoners to interpret their dreams - and, in due time, becomes abundantly fruitful through the trials when Pharaoh entrusts him with the welfare of all Egypt. As George Bush (Genesis commentator) shares, "he [Joseph] was aimed and shot at, as it were, by the bitter and reviling words of his brethren, and still more deeply wounded by their cruel treatment. He was sold into Egypt through envy, and imprisoned by a lie. His virtue was violently assaulted by his mistress, his innocence wronged by his master, and his patience severely tried by the ingratitude of a fellow prisoner. Yet "his bow abode in strength." The divine favor forsook him not" (Varner, page 57). In spite of all these great obstacles, Joseph faithfully and fruitfully overcame his circumstances. How did he do it? By steadfastly serving and trusting in God and no other.

There are many who compare Joseph to Jesus, because their lives share many parallels, which William Varner points out (pg. 56):

1. Joseph was the delight of his father (Gen. 37:3); Jesus was the "beloved Son" of His Father (Mat. 3:17)
2. Joseph was rejected by his brothers (Gen. 37:4, e.g,); Jesus' "own" did not receive Him (John 1:11)
3. Joseph was sold into Egypt (Gen. 37:28); Jesus fled there with His parents under duress (Mt. 2:14, 15)
4. Joseph withstood temptation to sin (Gen. 39: 7-12); Jesus withstood Satan's temptations (Mt. 4:1-11)
5. Joseph was raised from the death of prison and exalted to the side of Pharaoh (Gen. 41:14 -43); Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted to His Father's right hand (Acts 2:32-33).
6. Joseph mercifully forgave his brothers for causing him to suffer (Gen. 50: 15-21); Jesus prayed that the Father would forgive those responsible for His suffering (Lk. 23:34)
7. Joseph took a Gentile bride (Gen. 41:45); Jesus is calling out Gentiles to be part of His bride (Col. 1:24-27).

Clearly these are interesting similarities and offers a good review of Joseph's life, but Varner cautions to not over-emphasize the details and miss the main point: Joseph trusted God in the midst of his many afflictions. After Pharaoh promotes Joseph to run the famine-recovery program for all of Egypt, he marries and has his first child. Imitating his mother

Rachel, who used the circumstances of his birth to name him, *Joseph named the firstborn Manasseh, "For,"* he said, *"God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household"* Genesis 41:51. After many years, the sting of his brothers' betrayal and hatred still exists, but Joseph can embrace the hard lessons of his past, and still celebrate God's deliverance. In fact, this steadfastness in the Lord allows him to forgive his brothers.

Moses blesses Joseph in Deuteronomy 33: 13-17, emphasizing fruitfulness of this son of Rachel from many sources -the land, sky, waters, animals, and nations -
13 Of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD be *his land, With the choice things of heaven, with the dew, And from the deep lying beneath, 14 And with the choice yield of the sun, And with the choice produce of the months. 15 "And with the best things of the ancient mountains, And with the choice things of the everlasting hills, 16 And with the choice things of the earth and its fullness, And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let it come to the head of Joseph, And to the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers. 17 "As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, And his horns are the horns of the wild ox; With them he will push the peoples, All at once,* to *the ends of the earth. And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, And those are the thousands of Manasseh."*

Source of Joseph's Strength and Fruitfulness

From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you With
blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

In these next phrases (from Matthew Henry, page 72), Jacob correctly attributes the fruitfulness of his son Joseph directly to his faithfulness to God when he uses five titles that illustrate the Lord's character.

1. *From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob* – all our strength for resisting temptations and bearing afflictions, comes from God, His grace is sufficient.

2. *From there is the Shepherd* – just as Joseph became the shepherd of Israel, and took care of his father and family, so Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd to all who repent and believe in His Salvation for forgiveness of sins.

3. *Stone of Israel* – Joseph was the foundation and strong support for his family during the famine and beyond, so Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone of the whole church of God (

4. *The God of your father who helps you* – This alludes to the promise God spoke to his grandfather Abraham, to his father Isaac, then to Jacob. Now the father passes the legacy to Joseph and the next generation: *"I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the **land** on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. 14 "Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the **families** of the earth **be blessed**. 15 "Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you*

go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." Genesis 28:13-15

5. *By the Almighty* – "The Hebrew word is *Shaddai,* which carries the idea of All-Sufficient One or Sustainer. It is formed from the Hebrew word for a mother's breast (*shad),* which nourishes and sustains the child. In the same way, God sustained Joseph in his weaknesses. It is also interesting to note that when Jacob described the abundant blessings on Joseph, he carefully mentioned "blessing of the breasts" (shad)" (Varner, page 57).

It is the powerful, perfect character of God that bestows blessings from all directions and includes the blessing of a future generation of children.

Blessings for the Descendants of Joseph

"The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

Next, Jacob speaks of the future blessings for the tribe of Joseph, and although Israel's fortune was greater than his father and grandfather, he prays that Joseph will enjoy even more abundant blessings of God. The patriarch uses bless six times in these verses and places these on the crown of the head of Joseph, *the one distinguished among his brothers.* The King James Version says, *separate from his brothers'*, using the Hebrew word *nazir* for separate, a term later used for the one who took a Nazirite vow. The parents of Samson (Judges 16:17), Samuel (1 Sam. 1:11) and John the Baptizer (Luke 1:15) took this vow to separate their sons from strong drink, from dead bodies, and from haircuts (Num. 6:2-21). Here, Jacob refers to not only his separation physically in Egypt for many years, but also Joseph's eminent dignity and devotion to God that makes him a 'prince among his brothers'.

Clearly Israel gives Joseph the blessing normally reserved for the firstborn. Reuben forfeited his place of leadership to Judah and his father's double blessing to Joseph with his incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine, described in 1 Chronicles 5:1,2. Genesis 48 describes dying Jacob giving Joseph his double portion.

*3 Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' 5 "**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 "But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance.*

First, Jacob adopts his two sons, then as he blesses his grandsons, who are now considered his sons, he elevates second born Ephraim above his older brother Manasseh:

15 <u>He blessed Joseph,</u> and said,

"The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
***The God who has been my shepherd** all my life to this day,*
16 The angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads;
And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

When Joseph points out Jacob is blessing the younger, his father replies 19 *"I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, **his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations**." 20 He blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and 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 bring you back to the land of your fathers**. 22 "**I give you one portion more than your brothers**, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."*

The double blessing on Joseph means he will have two tribes rather than one, with his tribe becoming now known as Ephraim and Manasseh. Interestingly, the 16 tribal listings after Genesis, Joseph is mentioned only three times, being replaced by Ephraim and Manasseh.

Blessings of a land and a people

The fruitfulness of Joseph, now known as Ephraim and Manasseh, is evident in the two numbering of the Israelites at the beginning and end of the Wilderness Wanderings. In both censuses, their combined population exceeds the next largest tribe of Judah by several thousand, thus fulfilling Jacob's words that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh *grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth*. Manasseh (sometimes called Machir Num. 26:29) possessed the largest land allotment of all the 12, settling on both the east and west sides of the Jordan River. The younger Ephraim, however, enjoyed more prestige both in the individuals produced (Joshua, the servant of Moses for example) as well as its importance in the nation. The entire northern kingdom was often called Ephraim during the later prophets (Hosea 11:3; Jer. 31:9, 20) and several significant cities such as Bethel, Shechem, and Megiddo are in its territory.

Fruitfulness of Jacob's Legacy

Since God spoke His promise to Abraham of a land, a nation, and a blessing - which Jacob clearly passes on to his eleventh born son Joseph in Genesis 49 – the enemy Satan continually tries to extinguish it. When Jacob relocates his entire family to Egypt to reunite with Joseph and avoid starvation in Canaan, the connection to the land of Promise is almost severed. Will 450 years living in exile in Egypt negate the Covenant of God? Both Jacob and Joseph understand the vital connection to their land, and give clear deathbed exhortations that their descendants return there.

Years earlier when Jacob fled his brother Esau and moved to Paddan-aram, God declares, *Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you* (Gen. 28: 13). After living

20 years with his uncle Laban, Jacob returns to Canaan, expecting to die here. But God has other plans - plans to sell Joseph into slavery in Egypt in order to use him to provide bread for his family as well as the world. Before Jacob leaves Canaan to reunite with Joseph (in Genesis 46:3-4) God assures him that His promise of the land continues, *"I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt**, for I will make you a great nation there**. 4 "I will go down with you to Egypt, and **I will also surely bring you up again**; and Joseph will close your eyes."*

The patriarch does not forget the words of God. When he blesses Joseph's sons, Israel reminds his precious child Joseph to return to Canaan, *"Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring **you** back to the land of your fathers* (Gen. 48:21). Soon after, he utters his dying wish in Genesis 49:29: *"I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite.* Joseph does close his father Jacob's eyes and takes great care to bring his father back to the land for a grand burial procession (Gen. 50).

The favorite son of Jacob does not forget his father's plea, and has the same deathbed wish as Israel: *Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and **you shall carry my bones up from here**."*

"When [Joseph] saw his death approaching, he comforted his brethren with the assurance of their return to Canaan in due time. We must comfort others with the same comforts with which we have been comforted of God, and encourage them to rest on the promises which are our support. For a confession of his own faith, and a confirmation of theirs, he charges them to keep his remains unburied til that glorious day, when they could be settled in the land of promise. Thus Joseph, by faith in the doctrine of the resurrection, and the promise of Canaan, gave commandment concerning his bones. This would keep up their expectation of a speedy departure from Egypt, and keep Canaan continually in their minds. The death, as well as the life of this eminent saint, was truly excellent; both furnish us with strong encouragement to persevere in the service of God. How happy to set out early in the heavenly race, to continue steadfastly, and to finish the course with joy! Matthew Henry, page 73.

May each of us imitate Joseph, by faithfully waiting on God during trials, being fruitful in all of our endeavors regardless of how routine or insignificant, and anticipating God using us to bless others in His perfect timing.

Group discussion: Joseph's brothers return to his house to plead for Benjamin's release after he is arrested for 'stealing' Joseph's diving cup. Judah offers to stay in his youngest brother's place to preserve their aged father's life. As Joseph witnesses the true repentance of his brothers, he breaks down sobbing and reveals his identity.

Genesis 45:3-15

Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence. 4 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "Please come closer to me." And they came closer. And he said, "I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.

1. Why are Joseph's brothers dismayed when he identifies himself?

2. Discuss Joseph's power to judge the brothers –who is innocent and in authority? Who is guilty with no defense for their actions? How is this like God and any sinner who asks for forgiveness?

5 "Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, ***for God*** *sent me before you to preserve life. 6 "For the famine* has been *in the land these two years, and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. 7 "****God sent me*** *before you to preserve for you a remnant in the earth, and to keep you alive by a great deliverance. 8 "Now, therefore,* ***it was not you who sent me here, but God****; and He has made me a father to Pharaoh and lord of all his household and ruler over all the land of Egypt. 9 "Hurry and go up to my father, and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, "****God has made me lord of all Egypt****; come down to me, do not delay.*

3. What is Joseph's explanation for his slavery, his imprisonment, and his years of hardship because of the betrayal of his brothers?

4. What part does Joseph claim for his promotion to lord of all Egypt?

10 "You shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. 11 "There I will also provide for you, for there are still five years of famine to come, *and you and your household and all that you have would be impoverished."' 12 "Behold, your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin* see, *that it is my mouth which is speaking to you. 13 "Now you must tell my father of all my splendor in Egypt, and all that you have seen; and you must hurry and bring my father down here." 14 Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept on his neck. 15 He kissed all his brothers and wept on them, and afterward his brothers talked with him.*

5. What does Joseph promise to his father and brothers? What does God promise to his sons and daughters?

6. What does his family have to do in order to enjoy Joseph's generosity?

After Jacob's death and burial, Joseph's brothers are skeptical of Joseph's forgiveness and appeal to him to spare them for their father's sake.

Genesis 50:19-21a *But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 20 "As for you, you meant evil against me,* but *God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

7. Why is Joseph able to not hold a grudge against his brothers and truly forgive them?

8. Discuss the lessons from Joseph's life and how you can apply them to your situation.

Homework

1. Gen 49: 22 (NIV): "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall." Read Psalm 80 using the vine metaphor for Joseph and his brothers. Record any thoughts.

2. Note: Gibeah is settled by men of Benjamin. Read Judges chapter 20 about the Benjamite War. What caused the war? Who is fighting whom? Who inquires of the Lord (20:18, 27)? Who wins?

3. Read Judges 21, the aftermath of the Benjamite War. What vow is made in verse 1? What is the result of this rash vow? How is the problem solved?

4. Read about Abner, the cousin in King Saul in 2 Sam. 2. What is Abner's idea? How does it turn out?

Resources

Jacob's Dozen: A Prophetic Look at the Tribes of Israel by William Varner, 1987.
John MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV, 1982
Rose Book of Bible Charts, Maps, & Time Lines, 2005.
Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary of the Whole Bible, 1997
The Ryrie Study Bible, New American Standard Translation, 1978