

Midweek Meditation, June 23, 2021

## Genesis 48

You may remember from last week, we said that Jacob came to the place where he acknowledged that he was toward the end of his years. And at the end of our meditation last week, I said that we had some important work left to do. Well, in the passage last week, Jacob's age was mentioned as being 130 years. In this passage he is even closer to his time of death. And he is in his 140s. The passage we have shared today takes place "Some Time later", and that ends up being at least 15 to 17 years later. Joseph is informed that his father's health is not very good. So, in response to the news that his father is ill, Joseph takes his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim and, together, they go to visit Jacob. And when Jacob was told that his son, Joseph had come to see him, he rallied his strength and sat up on the side of the bed, which gives us the picture that Jacob is not far from his death. And in his dying days, God still had some jobs for him to accomplish before he took his last breath. And the work that Jacob had to do was all about making his sons clear about the family lineage. Jacob had received a directive from God as to how the lineage of his chosen people was going to work. Now ordinarily, the first born would be the heir, plain and simple, but it was not the simple, for a couple of reasons. First, Joseph had been Jacob's favorite since he was born. And also, Joseph was the first child born between Rachael and Jacob. And it seems reasonable to believe that Rachael was the woman chosen by God for Jacob and so, it also seems reasonable that Joseph might be the heir to God's promise, and the leader of God's chosen people. Remember, Leah was only married to Jacob because his uncle Laban tricked him into marrying Leah first. But clearly Jacob loved Rachael, and I am convinced that were it not for Laban's trick, Rachael would have been Jacob's only wife. Remember, the other wives of Jacob only came about because of a battle between Rachael and Leah over who would provide the most children to Jacob. Anyway, God, through the voice of Jacob was now making it clear that the first born of Rachael and Jacob, Joseph, was the first in line with respect to the promise of God to Abraham. You may remember back from chapter 35 of Genesis, Reuben, Jacob's oldest son, tried to use the pagan ritual of sleeping with his father's concubines in order to claim his inheritance as the first born. Apparently, God was not impressed with that plan, nor was Jacob, because here we are now, Reuben is out, and Joseph is in. And so, it is now Joseph that is entitled to a double inheritance. And just to make things a bit more complicated, that double inheritance will go to Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And that is exactly what this little gathering at Jacob's death bed is all about. So, in the end, the twelve tribes of Israel are a little different than Jacob's twelve sons. Surprisingly, Joseph is not on the list, but rather is two sons are. The eldest, or in Joseph's case the one chosen by God to be the first in line, gets a double portion of the inheritance. And that double portion according to God's plan will be received by Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Simeon and Judah are put upon to share the tribe that bears the name of Judah. And the descendants of Levi are priests and so they are given cities in several areas of the land. The Levites are still considered one of the tribes of Israel. So, given these adjustments in this list of the tribes of Israel, the final list of the tribes of Israel looks like this. Ephraim, Manasseh, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Reuben, and Benjamin. The sons of Jacob that are not on this list are Simeon who is sharing a tribe allotment with Judah, and Joseph whose double portion is split between his two Egyptian born sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. The blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim, Joseph's sons, are one of Jacob's tasks that he has to accomplish before he dies. Jacob explains to Joseph in chapter 48, that God came to him many years ago and proclaimed that the descendants of Abraham would be many and that they would be heir to a promise. And that promise would make them God's chosen people.

And Jacob believes that it is God's will for Joseph to be the first in the line of his offspring. And so, Jacob blesses Joseph. Jacob says to Joseph, I never expected to see your face again, and now, God has allowed me to see your children too. He says to Joseph, "May the God before whom my father's, Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm, may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name, and become of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth. And then he proclaims that Manasseh and Ephraim are now adopted by Jacob, and so each one of them are in line to receive a portion of Jacob's inheritance equal to that of all of his other sons. And then he explains to Joseph about his beloved wife Rachael and how she died along the road in the town called Bethlehem, and that Rachael who is Joseph's mother and Manasseh and Ephraim's grandmother, is buried in Bethlehem. So on the heels of that story about Rachael, Jacob brings Manasseh and Ephraim close to him and he prepares to impart his, rather, God's blessing upon his grandchildren who he has not adopted. Since Jacob can barely see, Joseph directs Manasseh to be on Jacob's right to receive the rightful blessing of the first born, and Ephraim on Jacob's left since Ephraim is the second son born to Joseph. But Jacob reaches his left hand out and places it upon Manasseh's head, and then crosses his right hand over his left in order to place it on the head of Ephraim. Joseph notices what Jacob is doing and tries to correct his aging father, but Jacob explains that he knows what he is doing. The scripture says that Jacob refused and he said to Joseph that he was well aware that Manasseh was the oldest, and he said Manasseh will indeed receive my blessing, but Ephraim will be greater, and so Jacob blessed his grandchildren in the way he believed that God was calling him to do. Ephraim would be the first in line followed by Manasseh, taking the place of Reuben who lost his number one spot by being too eager to receive it. And then Jacob says to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers. And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land, I took from the Ammorites with my sword and my bow. Jacob is telling Joseph, that he is now the patriarch of God's chosen people, and the people who proceed from Joseph and all of his brothers will one day be taken back to the land of Canaan and be the instrument of God's promise in that Holy Land. Perhaps Jacob envisioned that it would be in Joseph's generations, and not 400 years down the road, but this prophesy is God's word, and will be fulfilled in God's time. And that just about does it for Chapter 48. Jacob had on more task to accomplish and that will be the topic of conversation next week. For now, let us pray