

Genesis 48  
Psalm 121, 34  
John 4

“The Lord Be with You”

January 10, 2010

Every Sunday as we come to the Lord’s Table I say “the Lord be with you,”  
and you reply “and also with you.”

This practice goes back at least to the third century  
but we do not do this simply because of the antiquity of the practice.

We do it because it expresses a basic biblical truth that Jacob states in Genesis 48  
when he says “God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers.”

When I say “the Lord be with you,”  
I am blessing you with the blessing of Abraham.  
And when you reply “and also with you,”  
you are receiving that blessing and expressing your wish  
that I participate in the blessing of Abraham as well.

And then I say “Lift up your hearts,”  
a call rooted in our Psalm of response, Psalm 121,  
“I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?  
My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

You may wonder, “how can we lift up our hearts to the Lord?”  
Indeed, how can we who are earthly lift up our hearts to the heavens?

But that is why we start with “the Lord be with you”!  
It is only if the Lord is with us –  
it is only by the presence and blessing of the Lord  
that we can lift our hearts up to the Lord!

We lift up our hearts not in arrogance – not saying “we are strong and holy”  
but rather with the same attitude that Jeremiah had in Lamentations 3:40-42,  
“Let us test and examine our ways, and return to the LORD!  
Let us lift up our hearts and hands to God in heaven:  
‘We have transgressed and rebelled, and you have not forgiven.’”

Lifting up your heart is not an act of pride,  
but of humility.

When we lift up our hearts to the Lord  
we are saying that we are helpless apart from the Lord –  
and that our help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

Sing Psalm 121  
John 4

How many tribes are there?

Twelve, right?

Sort of.

But in another sense there are 13 – or even 14!

Manasseh and Ephraim are added to the 12 sons of Israel –  
which makes 14.

But since Manasseh and Ephraim are the “double portion” of Joseph,  
they replace Joseph (in most lists),  
which still leaves 13.

The land, for instance, is apportioned among twelve tribes –  
with Levi left out.

Joshua 13-19 recounts twelve tribes that received land.

Here Levi is the thirteenth tribe!

But in other accounts, Simeon is melded into Judah  
and Levi is the twelfth tribe.

And in Revelation 7 Dan is omitted and Joseph named in place of Ephraim!

We’ll look at the blessing of the twelve tribes more next week,

but today we are looking at how Manasseh and Ephraim are added to the sons of Jacob.  
Jacob claims them as his own sons.

And in so doing, Jacob gives to Joseph the “double portion” of the firstborn.

Chapters 48-49 fit together as the blessing of the tribes of Israel,  
with the blessing of the firstborn being given here in chapter 48,  
while the blessing of all the sons of Jacob is given in chapter 49.

We have seen throughout Genesis that the promise to Abraham includes three things:  
the promised land  
the promised seed  
the blessing to the nations.

But underlying these three things is that which makes it all worthwhile:

*I will be your God and you will be my people.*

It is the presence of God – the promise that God will be *with you* –  
that is at the heart of every other blessing.

In chapter 48 we look at how the Blessing of Abraham  
now comes to Joseph and to his sons.

## **1. The Blessing of Abraham in the Life of Jacob (v1-7)**

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.

Notice that Jacob is called Israel only in this sentence,  
reminding us of how God had renamed Jacob and blessed him  
when he appeared to him at Peniel,  
when Jacob returned to the land after sojourning in Paddan Aram.

But Jacob himself is thinking of an earlier appearance:

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 offspring after you for an everlasting possession.’

There are three things that we need to see in verses 3-4:

- 1) the importance of place: Luz is the ancient name of Bethel  
(Jacob was the one who named it Bethel – House of God –  
precisely because of this episode).
- 2) the importance of God’s name: Jacob speaks of God Almighty (El Shaddai)  
the name that God had revealed to Abraham –  
the name associated with the Abrahamic Promise.
- and 3) the importance of what *God* has said:  
Jacob refers to the first two parts of the Abrahamic covenant –  
Land and Seed.  
Notice that Jacob does *not* refer to what Isaac said.  
Isaac, his father, had blessed him with the blessing of Abraham,  
but Jacob is not concerned about that.  
He has something better than the blessing of Isaac –  
he has that which the blessing of Isaac had pointed:  
the blessing of God Almighty!

But notice that the language that Jacob uses “I will make you fruitful and multiply you”  
draws on the language of the Adamic blessing.

And the statement,

“I will make of you a company of peoples”  
could also be translated “an assembly of peoples”  
(It is the word used in the rest of the Pentateuch to refer to the “assembly”)

God is going to fulfill his Adamic promise in Israel.

And as a token of this, he will give the promised land to the promised seed  
“for an everlasting possession.”

Remember that at the end of chapter 47

we heard how the Egyptians lost their land to Pharaoh –  
and how Israel obtained possessions in Egypt, at least for a while.  
In contrast to this is the promise that the seed will inherit the land forever.

Think about that last phrase,  
*I will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.*

In Romans 4 Paul will talk about this  
as the promise that the Seed of Abraham would inherit the whole earth.  
And when you see how Egypt partook of the benefits of the promise to Abraham  
because Pharaoh entrusted his kingdom to Joseph,  
you can see how indeed, the promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob  
is indeed intended to be brought the whole earth –  
because *Jesus* is the Seed to whom the promise is made!

And then Jacob says that because of this promise, there are two things that follow:  
as for you (v5-6)  
and as for me (v7)

*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;*

It was not uncommon in the ancient world  
for a grandfather to adopt certain grandsons as his own.  
Jacob now says that Joseph's two sons born *before* Jacob came to Egypt  
are Jacob's own sons.

*Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are.*

Interesting comparison, no?  
Reuben and Simeon were the two eldest sons.  
But we have already seen that Jacob has disowned their deeds,  
Reuben for sleeping with Jacob's concubine,  
Simeon (with Levi) for slaughtering the men of Shechem.

But Jacob says that the rest of Joseph's children shall be included with Manasseh and Ephraim.

*6 And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours.  
They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.*

Who are these "other children" of Joseph.  
In all the genealogies we are only told of two sons of Joseph.  
But Jacob says that Joseph fathered other children.  
Why do we never hear of them?  
Because they were included with Ephraim and Manasseh.

This reminds us that biological descent is not always the point!  
If you are a descendent of Joseph,  
then you will be a part of either Ephraim or Manasseh –  
even if you are not descended from them!

But having adopted Ephraim and Manasseh,  
Jacob gives something of the reason why:

*7 As for me, when I came from Paddan,  
to my sorrow Rachel 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)."*

Rachel was the beloved wife.  
She was Jacob's first love.  
And while many commentators have missed the point,  
she was also Jacob's *first* wife.  
It is true that Laban deceived Jacob and gave him Leah in place of Rachel  
on his wedding night.  
But Jacob was legally betrothed to Rachel first.  
And so there is a sense in which Rachel *was* his first wife.

Tonight we'll be hearing more about Rachel and her weeping,  
but in Genesis 48 we hear about Jacob's sorrow  
as Rachel died after giving birth to Benjamin.

Jacob seems to be saying that he is adopting Ephraim and Manasseh  
as a way of increasing his children by Rachel.  
She gave birth to two sons –  
but now by adopting the sons of Joseph  
she will have three portions in the inheritance of the Promised Land.

It is curious, though, that Jacob emphasizes Bethlehem.  
Rachel's tomb is located near the border between Benjamin and Judah,  
but the town that is identified is Bethlehem – or Ephrath.  
Jacob probably did not fully understand the significance of this.

But when you look back at Israel's history  
it is no accident that Rachel's death is connected with Judah.  
Rachel, the beloved wife, is buried near the birthplace of the Messiah.

## **2. The Blessing of Abraham Is Given to Joseph (v8-16)**

*8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?"*

It is possible that Joseph lives so far away that he does not recognize his grandsons. But it is also possible that Jacob is asking a question very much like when I ask  
“Who gives this woman to be married to this man?”  
I am not asking out of ignorance, but as a part of a legal ritual. In the same way, it is likely that Jacob is asking this question as a part of his legal adoption of his grandsons.

Of course, the third option is simply that his eyesight is so bad that he cannot tell who these people are!  
And the fourth option is that this part of Genesis 48 happened when Jacob first came down to Egypt. The fact that Ephraim and Manasseh can be said to be on his knees indicates that they are still very young – but since Jacob spends 17 years in Egypt, this illness of Jacob may well have been early in his sojourn in Egypt. This may, in fact, be the first time that Jacob met Ephraim and Manasseh – and they may still be little boys.

(But quite frankly, the timing of the episode does not really matter!)

*9 Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.”  
And he said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.”  
10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see.*

This is interesting.  
Because this is the same language used of Isaac in 27:1.  
Even as Isaac in his old age had become blind,  
so now Jacob cannot see.

And so you expect “poetic justice” –  
Genesis has so often shown us that with the same measure that you judge  
you also will be judged.

Jacob had used his father’s blindness to deceive his father –  
surely Jacob will now be deceived, right?

But even in his old age – even in his blindness –  
even though the eyes of his body are dim with age,  
still he sees clearly by faith.

It is remarkable.  
After using these sorts of markers to clue us in to some trickery throughout Genesis,  
now we see that physical blindness need not dim your spiritual vision!

*So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them.  
11 And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see your face;*

*and behold, God has let me see your offspring also.”*

Interesting words for a blind man!

I never expected to see your face, but God has let me see your children.  
Whether or not he can see them with his eyes is beside the point!

And that point is important for us as well.

The question is not what you see with your eyes.

What you see with your eyes is not altogether encouraging!

The question is what you see by faith!

Our Lord Jesus Christ saw the glory set before him,  
and so he endured the cross and all its shame,  
so that he might see his offspring – so that he might see us –  
joined to himself as he brings the blessing of Abraham to the Gentiles.

*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 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).*

Isaac had also blessed the younger when he blessed Jacob instead of Esau.  
But here the reversal is quite intentional.

Jacob has adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as his own,  
and so he blesses them, right?

*15 And he blessed Joseph*

What?

His hands are on the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh.  
And he blessed Joseph.

After all, in this blessing Jacob is giving to Joseph the double portion.  
Joseph is blessed through this blessing that Jacob pronounces  
on the two sons of Joseph.

*and [Jacob] 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;*

(This does not help us with their ages –  
a “na’ar” could be anything from a small child to a young man.)  
But it does help us understand the fundamental point of the Abrahamic covenant.  
“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked.”  
We sang Psalm 121 – the LORD is my keeper.  
It is the precise of God with us that is at the heart of God’s covenant.

And note the two images that go with that:  
the shepherd who guides and protects me;  
the angel (or messenger) who redeems me from evil.  
God, like a shepherd, took Jacob out from the land,  
and now is bringing them back.

The angel of the LORD that appeared to him at Peniel –  
the angel whom Jacob had seen and wrestled –  
the angel who had blessed Jacob with the blessing of God –  
is now the angel who will redeem Israel from all evil.

Please understand that from the beginning,  
the point has always been that God would be with his people.

And so now Jacob pronounces his blessing on the sons of Joseph:

*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.”*

Jacob is not saying, “let all Israel increase and become strong.”  
Jacob is saying let Ephraim and Manasseh grow into a multitude.  
The name of Israel will be retained and maintained through out history  
by Ephraim and Manasseh.

Both tribes will be so numerous and so warlike,  
that the day will come when “Israel” will simply be called “Ephraim,”  
and Manasseh will be so large that it will be given a piece of the inheritance  
on each side of the Jordan.

But as we see in verses 17-20,

### **3. The Blessing of Abraham Disregards Earthly Privilege (v17-20)**

Joseph doesn’t get it yet.

For all of his wisdom and for all of his faithful obedience to Christ,  
Joseph is still missing something.

*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."*

It may seem odd that Joseph, who passed over 10 of his older brothers  
in order to receive the double portion,  
should now be preoccupied with the rights of primogeniture!  
But Jacob, the blind man, sees clearly.  
He sees by faith that Ephraim will be the dominant power.

As Bruce Waltke has said,  
"Blind Isaac blessed Jacob without knowing it.  
Jacob, though blind, knows and deliberately follows God's unconventional plan.  
If Isaac's unwitting blessing could not be reversed,  
how much more this conscious blessing? (p600)

And in his blessing, he says that  
Manasseh *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 [fullness] 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.*

But we have to remember that the blessing of Abraham was *always*  
more than just a promise of a piece of real estate with lots of kids.

Sure, land and seed are invariably connected  
with the Promised Land and the Seed of the Woman  
whom God promised to his people.

And so now the name of Jesus is continued through history  
as the only name under heaven by which men must be saved.

And so verses 21-22 are less about a piece of real estate in the middle east,  
and more about the resurrection of the dead.

#### **4. The Blessing of Abraham Will Bring You Home (v21-22)**

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.”*

“One mountain slope” literally reads, “I give to you Shechem over your brothers.”

What is he referring to?

We know that Jacob purchased a piece of land near Shechem (Gen 33:18-19),  
which led to the skirmish with Shechem and his father, Hamor.

But in Genesis 33, we are told that Jacob purchased the land.  
And in Genesis 34, we are told that Simeon and Levi slaughtered the man.

Now Jacob refers back to that conquest as a part of his military work.

This again hints at Jacob’s tacit approval of Simeon and Levi –  
to the point that he claims their capture of the city as his own work.

This is why we read John 4.

Because in John 4 we hear about this same little piece of real estate –  
now referred to as Jacob’s well which he gave to Joseph.  
And for that matter, the Samaritans were descendents of Ephraim.

And Jesus’ point to the Samaritan woman  
is that our identity is not tied Mt Gerizim (the Samaritan temple)  
or to the earthly Jerusalem (the Jewish temple).

Rather, our identity is tied to Christ.

We are citizens of the heavenly Jerusalem,  
and we are looking for *that city*.

Close with Psalm 34 – taste and see

and note TH 539 – God will bring you again to the land of your fathers – “O sweet and bless-ed  
country, the home of God’s elect! O sweet and bless-ed country that eager hearts expect! Jesus,  
in mercy bring us to that dear land of rest; who are, with God the Father and Spirit, ever blest.”