

THE BLESSING

Joseph: Man Of Faith...Image Of Christ

by Ron Ritchie

A few years ago I was washing my car in my driveway when I noticed a boy of ten riding his bike in circles out on the street. I had seen him around on several occasions and had found out that his mother and father worked late most evenings, leaving him on his own after school. I also found out from neighbors that he would go from home to home on our street hoping someone would give him some milk and cookies. So I called him over and we sat on the curb and began to talk.

The first thing I asked him was, "What's your name?"

"Joshua," he said quietly without looking up.

"Joshua!" I exclaimed. "Do you know what that name means?"

"No."

I told him that Joshua was the name of a mighty general of the Lord who built an army and conquered a wicked, larger army in a land now called Israel. I then told him that Joshua in the Hebrew language means "Jehovah Saves," and that when God sent his son to this earth he wanted his name to be Joshua, or Jesus, for he would save his people from their sin.

My young friend was somewhat interested but a little more intimidated. He got back on his bike and rode away.

However, the next day he knocked on our door, and my wife's French aunt opened it. She asked him if she could help him, and he pointed to a sign we have on the door:

*As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.
Joshua 24:15*

"I'm Joshua!" he said. "He was a famous general. And I'm here to see Ron."

Out on that curb the day before, what I had really done was give this lonely boy a blessing in symbolic form. I sought to speak well of him because he was created in the image of God. I tied him into God's creative purpose in the same way that God tied Adam and Eve into his creative purpose, for after he created them in his own image he blessed them, giving them a sense of worth and responsibility (see Genesis 1:27-28). Later God put together a people whom he accepted and was willing to protect beginning with a blessing, among their number Abraham, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon (see Genesis 14:19; Deuteronomy 33:1-5; Numbers 6:23-27; 1 Kings 8:15-61). My friend Joshua had a new sense of worth, acceptance, and protection; and this was amply illustrated as day after day he boldly knocked on our door, entered our home, and walked directly into our kitchen, where he sat on the counter and asked for some milk and cookies.

In the Old Testament story of the blessing of Joseph's sons, we will see how important a father's blessing was to them, and then we will discover how deeply most of us in our own day hunger for a blessing not only from God, but from our parents and from each other in the body of Christ. There is some great news about that for all of us at the end of this message. But first let me quickly summarize the events of chapters 46 and 47, and then in Genesis 48:1-22 we'll look in on the scene where Joseph brought his two sons to be blessed by their grandfather Jacob just before he died.

In Genesis 46-47 Joseph helped his brothers make preparations to bring their aged father Jacob and their families from Hebron, Canaan, down to Egypt in the midst of a horrible famine (see Genesis 46:26; Acts 7:14). Finally Jacob met his long-lost son Joseph, and they kissed and wept. Then they made arrangements for Jacob and his family to settle in the land of Goshen, which is north of the modern city of Cairo and east of the Nile River. Upon Joseph's instructions, the brothers conveyed to Pharaoh when they were presented to him that they were self-supporting and not immigrants, bringing with them their own flocks. Pharaoh was encouraged and gave them the best part of the land of Goshen. Pharaoh then met Jacob, who blessed him.

Meanwhile the famine increased in severity, so Joseph designed a plan for the Egyptians to survive the famine: First they exchanged money for grain (47:13-14), then they mortgaged herds for grain (47:15-17), and finally they mortgaged land and became royal slaves for grain (47:18-26). The people were pleased with Joseph and told him that he had saved their lives.

"Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number." In Genesis 47:28-31, seventeen years after Jacob had arrived in Egypt, at the age of 147 he called for a meeting with Joseph and told him it would soon be time for him to die. He asked Joseph to make a promise in concert with his faith in God that Jacob would be buried in the cave of his fathers Abraham and Isaac in Hebron, Canaan. This would be an outward symbol of the spiritual reality that Jacob believed that God would keep all his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and now him concerning their place in the land of Canaan. To be buried in Egypt would be a symbol of unbelief in the Abrahamic covenant. Joseph promised his father he would bury him in Canaan. For Israel's hope lay in Canaan, not Egypt.

This promise would be clearly stated by Ezekiel some thirteen hundred years later (587 BC) when God spoke through him to the people of Israel who were in the Babylonian captivity (37:12-14): "O my people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them; I will bring you back to the land of Israel...I will put my Spirit in you and you will live, and I will settle you in your own land." Then the Lord went on to speak of the divided tribes, represented as Judah and Joseph, becoming one nation under his servant David as king once again, and they would all have one shepherd whom we now know to be Messiah Jesus. He would make an everlasting covenant with them, and he would be their God and they would be his people. And they would live in the land that he gave to Jacob. This will all be fulfilled in the end times (see Romans 10-11).

Now in chapter 48, the horrible seven-year famine had ended, the sons of Joseph were growing into young men, and Jacob was still 147 years old and was prepared to die. But first he wanted to see his son Joseph and his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim.

A review of the Abrahamic covenant

Genesis 48:1-7

Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed.

Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, 'I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'

"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers. As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).

Jacob's (Israel's) health was failing to the point that a messenger was sent from Goshen to the capital to inform Joseph that his father was deathly ill. Joseph made immediate plans to visit his dying father and called his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim to join him to visit their grandfather. When Jacob heard that Joseph had arrived, he found the strength to sit up in his sickbed and greet him and his grandsons. (This is the first of two deathbed scenes, one with Joseph's two sons and then one with his own twelve sons in chapter 49.) Jacob was nearly blind at this time of blessing, just as his father Isaac had been many years earlier when he gave blessings to his brother Esau and him. But at that time Jacob had deceived his nearly-blind father and had gotten the choice blessing from him (see Genesis 27).

Jacob began reviewing God's covenant with Joseph and the two grandsons. His mind went back to the day when he had met the Lord in Luz, or Bethel. It had occurred when he was fleeing from Hebron because he had just deceived his father Isaac and stolen the blessing from his brother Esau. He was heading north to his uncle Laban's home in Syria, a journey of four hundred miles. On the way he lay down to sleep and had a dream in which he saw a ladder going up to heaven with angels of God ascending and descending on it. Above it stood the Lord, who said, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you" (Genesis 28:13-15).

Twenty years later God had told Jacob to return to Canaan where he settled in Shechem. He left his uncle Laban, ran into some angels at a place he would later call Mahanaim, "The Camp of God," and then had a wrestling match with God himself, at which time his name was changed by God from Jacob to Israel ("One Who Wrestled with God"). Finally he made peace with his brother Esau. But once settled in Shechem, his daughter Dinah was raped by a man in Shechem, and his sons Simeon and Levi killed every male in the city. So God told Jacob to move with his family to Bethel, and it was there that he built an altar to God. Then God appeared to Jacob again and renewed his covenant with him: "I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number [this is wishing him well, not a command]. A nation and a community of nations will come from you, and kings will come from your body. The land I gave to Abraham and Isaac I also give to you, and I will give this land to your descendants after you" (Genesis 35:11-12).

After reviewing God's covenant, Jacob told Joseph something that on the surface appears strange: "I want to adopt your two sons, and they will be blood sons like my own sons, like Reuben my first-born and Simeon. All the children you have after this will be yours. But these two sons of yours [and their families] whom I will now adopt will be placed under the blessings of the Abrahamic covenant." (They would later become two of the most important of the ten northern tribes of Israel who stood in bitter opposition to the kingdom of Judah.) This act of adoption made Ephraim and Manasseh not simply Jacob's heirs, but the ancestors of tribes on a par with those tracing their origin back to Jacob's own sons.

"And as you know, I buried your mother on the road to Bethlehem." Jacob may have mentioned this because he remembered how his beloved wife Rachel had been barren for so many years before she gave birth to Joseph, whose name meant "May Jehovah Add" (more children). And then she had died giving birth to her second son Benjamin ("Son of My Right Hand"). He then buried her by the road to Bethlehem. Rachel's tomb in Canaan symbolized the heart of Jacob and his belief that God would keep his promises to give the land as an "eternal possession" to the seed of Abraham. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were already buried in Hebron not far from Bethlehem (see Genesis 49:31), serving as a reminder of the faithfulness of God to his covenant promise.

As Jacob adopted his two grandsons and placed them under all the blessings of God's covenant with Abraham, so Paul reminds us that spiritually "all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him" (Romans 8:14-17).

Now came the actual blessing from Jacob.

The spiritual blessing

Genesis 48:8-22

When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, "Who are these?"
"They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father.

Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them."

Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.

Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too."

Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the first-born.

Then he blessed Joseph and said,

"May the God before whom my fathers
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 the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
and may they increase greatly
upon the earth."

When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the first-born; put your right hand on his head."

But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." He blessed them that day and said,

"In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing:
'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Then Israel said 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 Amorites with my sword and my bow."

It is obvious that Joseph's two sons were in their later teens or early twenties when they stood in the presence

of their grandfather on this occasion. Jacob's eyesight was failing, so even as he looked at these two young men he could not distinguish their faces and may have thought they were his son's servants. Finally he realized who they were and kissed and embraced them. His heart was deeply moved that not only was he allowed to be with his son whom he had once thought dead, but he was allowed to live long enough to see his grandchildren. Both Jacob and Joseph were greatly aware of the presence and blessings of *Yahweh* in their lives and the lives of the future generations, and of *Yahweh*'s great plan for the nation of Israel, which one day would bring blessings and salvation to the nations.

Joseph then removed his sons from the knees of their grandfather and bowed down before him with his face to the ground as a symbol of greatly honoring him. At the same time he placed Ephraim the second-born on his right side facing Jacob's left hand, and Manasseh his first-born, who would get the greatest blessing, on his left side facing Jacob's right hand. But it didn't go according to plan or custom. For moved by God, Jacob put his right hand of blessing not on the first-born but on the second-born Ephraim, and his left hand on the first-born Manasseh. "Manasseh will become a father of a people and become great, but Ephraim will become greater than his older brother and become a group of nations to offer blessing and salvation to the nations." The right hand of blessing, the birthright of the first-born, meant that Ephraim would get a double portion of the family inheritance along with the honor of one day becoming the family's leader (see also Deuteronomy 21:15-17). Jacob took the blessing that belonged to his first-born son Reuben and moved it to Joseph's second born son Ephraim, as it would later be stated in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2, Reuben defiled his father's bed.

"May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked...." Jacob connected his faith to the past, to his grandfather Abraham and his father Isaac, mentioning that both patriarchs were men who "walked with God" (*Elohim* ; see Genesis 24:40). To walk before God is to live one's life in the presence of God. Four hundred years later Moses would tell the second generation of Israelites after the Exodus, who were just about to enter the land of promise, "For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways...and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess" (Deuteronomy 30:15-16). The prophet Micah would later write in the seventh century BC to the people of God (6:8),

"And what does the LORD require of you?
To act justly and to love mercy
and to walk humbly with your God."

Enoch and Noah were also said to have walked with God (see Genesis 5:22; 6:9), as have all men and women of faith before and after the patriarchs.

"...The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day...." At 147 years of age Jacob could look back as a shepherd himself and see clearly that he had been a wandering and at times lost sheep, but God had been as near to him as a beloved spiritual Shepherd, so that at the end of his life he knew that he was still being cared for by him.

"...The Angel who has delivered me from all harm...." Jacob was aware that "the angel of the Lord" or "the messenger of the Lord" had stepped in when Abraham was about to sacrifice his father Isaac (see Genesis 22:11). Jacob himself saw the angels on the ladder in his dream and heard the promise that God made to protect him in the future: "...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" (28:15). The angel of the Lord appeared again to Jacob in a dream and told him to leave his uncle Laban and return to Canaan (see 31:11f). The "angel of the Lord" was the pre-incarnated Messiah Jesus.

"...May he bless these boys." Both boys would be blessed by God, but in different ways. God is God, and he had a plan to bring blessing and salvation to the nations in the way he deemed best. He was going to use all the sons of Jacob including these two newly adopted sons, but to different degrees and through different strengths in them.

"May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac...." Manasseh and Ephraim were now directly under the Abrahamic covenant with all its material and spiritual blessings, "...and may they

increase greatly upon the earth."

Joseph was displeased; once the blessing was given it was irreversible (see Numbers 23:20; Romans 11:29). "Father, you have given the blessing of the first-born to my second son---please place your right hand on the head of my first-born Manasseh!" But moved by the spirit of God, Jacob refused to switch the blessings, saying, "I know what I am doing. Don't worry about Manasseh---he too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he and his descendants will become a group of nations."

These two adopted sons would increase greatly, but one who would be blessed even more in the next chapter is Judah (1 Chronicles 5:1-3), from whom would come David and then the Messiah Jesus. These blessings were all based solely on the grace of God within the plan of God for the nations in every generation, until Christ would return to this earth to set up his kingdom. (These sons of Joseph are not mentioned in chapter 49 where Jacob blesses his twelve sons, because he did this privately.)

Now came a blessing from Jacob of prophetic significance and force. "In your [Joseph's] name will Israel [as a nation] pronounce this blessing: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Joseph will be so blessed in his two sons that their blessing will become a standing form of benediction in Israel. Notice that Ephraim is named before Manasseh.

Then Jacob (Israel) said to Joseph his first-born of Rachel whom he had loved deeply, "May God bless you and bring you back to the land he has promised our fathers and us. I also want to give you a gift, which is the ridge of land in Canaan where I fought the Amorites and won with my sword and bow." (This is a strange verse in the light of the fact that Jacob was known as "a quiet man, staying among the tents" [Genesis 25:27], not a warrior. This may refer to a battle connected with the murders of the men of Shechem by his two sons Reuben and Simeon.) What he was really saying was, "You must go back to Canaan; I have given you a piece of property you must claim." For Jacob had bought a piece of property from the Canaanites near the city of Shechem (see 33:18-19).

Jacob would shortly die in Egypt and was buried in Hebron, Canaan. Four hundred years later the Jews under Joshua would bury Joseph on Jacob's land in Shechem, Canaan (see Joshua 24:32; Acts 7:16). Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph are all still waiting by faith for the fulfillment of the promises of the Abrahamic covenant, with all its material and spiritual blessings for the Jewish people. Look at the blessings that are coming for God's beloved people: "I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless. I will confirm my covenant between me and you and will greatly increase your numbers...As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations...I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God" (Genesis 17:1-8).

The stories of Jacob and Joseph and their sons shows us how important a blessing from God was for the patriarchs, for it tied them in with the creative purpose and plans of God and pulled them together as a nation with his blessings of acceptance and protection. The need for the blessings of God is just as important for us and our families within the body of Christ. Many of us hunger for a spiritual blessing from God, our parents, and each other. The good news is that God has already spoken to this spiritual hunger in the words of Paul to the Ephesians. These are our current blessings from God himself:

"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will---to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding. And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, to be put

into effect when the times will have reached their fulfillment---to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ.

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession---to the praise of his glory" (Ephesians 1:3-14).

Our blessings: Chosen by the Father, redeemed by the Son, sealed by the Holy Spirit!

Once we understand that we have been spiritually blessed by God---tied into his creative purpose, fully accepted, and protected by him---that truth eliminates our isolation, fear, anger, and emptiness and fills our hearts with a sense of wholeness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. To be blessed by God is life-changing. So let's live under his blessings as a holy people, a spiritual community; and then pass those spiritual blessings on to our children, our neighbors, and even youngsters like Joshua who ride by our homes on their bikes.

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Ron Ritchie
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