

Isra'el Reached Out His Right Hand and Put It On Ephraim's Head, Though He Was the Younger

48: 8-20

DIG: Do you find anything ironic about the way that Jacob changes things up when he blesses Manasseh and Ephraim? What is different about the way in which Joseph and his sons accept this reversal, from the way Ya'akov and Esau acted?

REFLECT: Of all the events in Jacob's one hundred and forty seven years, why do you think this one act of blessing is singled out by the writer of Hebrews (Hebrews 11:21) as an example of outstanding faith? If Hebrews Chapter 11 were to include you in its "Hall of Faith," what event in your life would stand out as evidence of great faith? Do you submit to your heavenly Father even when you don't understand?

At this point, Ya'akov realized that Joseph had not come alone. Ephraim and Manasseh were probably standing behind, or off to the side of their father. When Isra'el saw the sons of Joseph, he asked: Who are these? His sight was good enough to distinguish people but not to specifically identify them. Yosef replied: They are the sons God has given me here. Then Isra'el, realizing that his time was short, said: Bring them to me so I may bless them (48:8-9). The motif of a blind patriarch giving a blessing to his descendants is reminiscent of when Jacob's own father Isaac was in this condition (27:1-5). Here, once again the firstborn will not receive the blessing. But this time it is the patriarch himself who causes the unexpected to occur.⁷⁴⁷

Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see as man sees. But he could see something that Joseph couldn't see. So Yosef brought his sons close to him, and still sitting, his father brought his sons close to him, and as they leaned over to him as he was sitting on the bed, his father kissed them and embraced them (48:10).

Isra'el said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children, too." As his mature sons stood by their grandfather's bed near his knees, Yosef moved them back a little so he could bow down with his face to the ground in prayer and submission to his father (48:11-12). Even though he was the prime minister of Egypt, second only to Pharaoh, Joseph found it appropriate to bow down before his father. Long ago he had a dream where his father, mother and brothers were all bowing down to him (37:9-10). His brothers did bow down to him (42:6, 44:14, 50:18), but his parents did not as far as we know from Scripture. Perhaps that part of his dream was influenced by his youthful opinion of himself.

After praying, Yosef rose and took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Isra'el's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and had them kneel close to Jacob as he sat on his bed. Joseph, thinking that his father couldn't see that well, positioned his sons the way *he thought they* should be blessed. In his mind, Israel's left hand would be on Ephraim's head because he was the younger son, and his right hand would be on Manasseh's head because he was the older son (the right hand being the more favored position of the firstborn). But once they were close to his face, Isra'el could see them clearly. Then, to the surprise of everyone but himself, Isra'el reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and deliberately crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn (48:13-14).

The blessing of the sons became the blessing of the father. As his hands were on the heads of Ephraim and Manasseh, he blessed Joseph through them 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 redeemed me from all harm - may he bless these boys.** This is the first time in the Bible that the Hebrew word *goel*, or *redeemed* is used, and it is significant that it occurs as a description of the Angel of the Lord, none other than the preincarnate Messiah.⁷⁴⁸ **May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth (48:15-16).** His prayer was that, from that time on, Ephraim and Manasseh would be known as sons of Ya'akov. His name and that of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham would live on.⁷⁴⁹

When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased because Manasseh was the firstborn. When Jacob and Yosef had previously discussed the blessing and adoption of his sons, Joseph had been silent. But when he realized that Jacob was going to bless Ephraim first, Yosef tried to correct what was in his mind a mistake. So he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head (48:17). **The rabbis teach that Jacob was confused because he couldn't see, so Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head" (48:18).** Yosef assumed that his father must have thought that Joseph would naturally have Manasseh at his right hand, which would have been Jacob's left, and that he had therefore crossed his hands.

Joseph, like so many others, expected ADONAI to work in a certain way, but found that He is often pleased to work differently and sometimes even unconventionally. But faith recognizes that God's ways are not always man's ways. It took Ya'akov a lifetime of discipline to learn that lesson. But learn it he did, and then he blessed the younger over the firstborn. For five consecutive generations this reversal continued: Abraham over Haran, Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and now, Ephraim over Manasseh.⁷⁵⁰

But his father refused to uncross his hands and said: I know, my son, I know. Jacob believed that **he** was guided by **the LORD's** grace to bestow spiritual and material possessions, all of which were irrevocable. Rather than a prayer, the final **blessing** was more like a prophecy, the fulfillment of which was ensured by **ADONAI Himself**. **Joseph** thought **his father** was blind, but in reality, **Jacob** saw into the future with great clarity when he prophesied: **He too will become a great people, and he too will become great**. No mistake was made. **He** was **blessing** according to the will of **God**, not according to human custom. **Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations (48:19)**. We can see the fulfillment of this in subsequent Scripture because **Ephraim** eventually became the dominant tribe in, and a synonym for, the entire northern kingdom of **Isra'el (Isaiah 7:2, 5, 9 and 17; Hosea 9:3-16)**.

Jacob's prophetic view is seen in the benediction **he** gives. **He blessed them that day** and said: **In your name will Isra'el pronounce this blessing, "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."** **He** saw **Isra'el** as a nation pronouncing a **blessing** on **Ephraim** and **Manasseh**. The content reminds us of **Ruth 4:11-12**, in which it is said: **May your family be like that of Perez**. It was a great honor to receive such praise. Significantly, the name of **Ephraim** appears before **his brother**. **So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh (48:20)**. And that fact sealed **their** places in this history of **the** tribes of **Isra'el**.⁷⁵¹ Thus **the patriarch** had **his way**, and **Yosef** promptly and fully accepted the situation.⁷⁵²

The writer to the **Hebrews** tells us that **the blessing** of **Joseph** through **his sons** was an act of **faith** on **Jacob's** part. And of all the things **the Holy Spirit** could have picked to be an example of **faith** in **Ya'akov's** entire life, **He** picked the blessing of **Yosef** through **his two sons**. **By faith Jacob, when he was dying blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he bowed himself on the head of his bed (Hebrews 11:21 and Genesis 47:31 NKJ)**. **Ya'akov** would die a man of **faith**.