

## If God is For Us: The Life and Trials of Joseph

*A Finale of Faith* (Genesis 48:1-22)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on December 14, 2025

### Introduction

- ❖ So now we're at the tail end of Genesis, wrapping up the stories of both Joseph and his father Jacob. Most of the plot lines have been concluded and resolved. **As we mentioned last week, the last four chapters (Genesis 47-50) feel a bit drawn out and (dare I say) boring.** Last week's chapter ended with what reads like Jacob's final moments.
  - The old man has been predicting his death for many chapters, and chapter 47 seems like it ends with a deathbed scene. But then chapter 48 begins with, *"After this."* There's more! Jacob keeps hanging around. More time passes, and we get another scene. A special scene where he adopts and blesses the two sons of Joseph.
- ❖ Many of you are probably unfamiliar with this event in Jacob's life. Or if you've read this before, it probably didn't jump out at you as anything important. **But according to Scripture, this particular moment – Jacob's actions in Genesis 48 – it's regarded as his greatest act of faith.** This was the highpoint of his storied life.
  - How do I know this? Because of **Hebrews 11**. If you've been with us since the summer, you know that we preached through Hebrews. And in chapter 11, we came across **the Hall of Faith**. That famous chapter that recounts the key moments in the stories of the most well-known OT saints. Those moments where they exercised great faith and believed against unbelief. Where they trusted God and stepped forward in obedience. Assured of things hoped for. Convicted of things unseen.
- ❖ Now if you recall, **Abraham** gets a lot of attention. He has multiple verses in Hebrews 11 highlighting his faith-driven actions. **Isaac**, on the other hand, only gets one verse about invoking future blessings on his sons (Heb 11:20). And that's understandable because there's not much about Isaac in the book of Genesis. Not like his father Abraham. Or his son Jacob.
  - There are twelve chapters dedicated to Jacob and his story. Now let's be honest, much of his life was marked by deception and great selfishness. But he had his moments. Where his faith really shined. **So you'd think he'd get as much space in the Hall of Faith as Abraham, but instead there's only one verse, one line.** And it doesn't highlight the moment you'd think would be his greatest. It doesn't say, "By faith, Jacob wrestled with the LORD and sought his blessing." No, that's *not* what's mentioned. Listen to **Hebrews 11:21**, *"By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff."*
    - It's *our* text. It's Genesis 48. What's mentioned is this moment when the elderly Jacob extends his hands over his grandsons and blesses them in faith. This is his greatest act of faith. Worthy to be enshrined in the Hall of Faith.
- ❖ That's surprising if you ask me. **On the surface, at first glance, it's hard to see how his actions in this chapter can be construed as a powerful demonstration of biblical faith.** So much so that the author of Hebrews singles it out among all the significant events in Jacob's life. But that's what it says, and it would do us well to explore that further. To figure out what Jacob was doing in this chapter and what it has to teach us about biblical faith.

- ❖ Let's divide this into three parts based on his three actions. First, we see Jacob **adopting** Joseph's sons with full inheritance rights. Second, he's **blessing** Joseph's sons with progeny and protection. Third, he's **gifting** Joseph with territory.

### Adopting Joseph's Sons

- ❖ So let's consider the first act of faith that Jacob exercises in this chapter. He essentially holds an adoption ceremony. **We see him, in vv1-12, adopting the two sons of Joseph as his own. Granting them full inheritance rights on par with their uncles.** His actions are recorded here, on one hand, to explain why, in subsequent books of the Bible, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are named among the Twelve Tribes of Israel. And why isn't there a tribe of Joseph? Our text answers those nagging questions.
  - **But more importantly, the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh is a powerful demonstration of biblical faith – on both Jacob and Joseph's part.** I think we can learn a lot from it.
- ❖ If you look with me at v1, it starts with Joseph receiving word that his father Jacob is ill. So he travels to Goshen, the region in Egypt where his family has established temporary residence. He brings his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. **Take note to how they're identified, Manasseh first (since he is the eldest) and then Ephraim.**
  - Now in contrast to earlier in Jacob's story, in Genesis 27, where he stole his brother's blessing by deceiving his blind father, there's no attempt on Joseph's part to deceive his blind father. We're told that's Jacob's eyesight is failing in v10. But his mind is clear and sharp. He has a plan. So he summons all his strength and sits up in bed.
- ❖ All those descriptions make it clear that, at this point, Jacob is an old man, nearing death's door, with just enough strength to sit up to offer a final blessing. **But it's an important observation, from a biblical perspective, that his greatest act of faith occurred at this stage of his long life.** At the final stage. At the finale. He probably thought the high point of his faith journey had already taken place in the past. He assumed he was long past the climax of his story, and that he's merely been living in a long, drawn out epilogue.
  - But *this* moment, at the tail end, was the climax, the high point, his greatest act of faith. **I hope that encourages those of you in a stage of life where you're prone to assume that the biggest victories and highest points in your faith journey have already taken place in the distant past.** Who knows? Maybe your greatest act of faith – the climax of your story – still lies before you. Yet to be fulfilled. So press on in faithfulness. Don't take your foot off the gas. Who knows what faith opportunities lie ahead? What a blessing it would be for your story to end like Jacob's.
- ❖ Now what we read in vv3-4 is a reminder of the unique nature of this blessing Jacob is going to bestow on the sons of Joseph. We're not talking about a common pleasantry. Like when I hear you sneeze and I say, "God bless you." That "blessing" holds little weight, no significance. But the blessing we're talking about here is far more serious.

- ❖ **Jacob is ready to pass on to his grandsons the very covenantal blessing he secured from his father Issac back in chapter 27 (:28-29).** Which was reinforced by God in chapter 28 while Jacob was escaping his brother's wrath and had a dream of a staircase to heaven. He named that place Bethel, but we're told the city's original name was Luz (Gen 28:19).
  - And then years later, in Genesis 35 (:10-12), when Jacob had returned to Luz (Bethel), the LORD revealed himself as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) and changed Jacob's name to Israel. **There he blessed Jacob again, promising to multiply him and make him fruitful.** So that his offspring becomes a company of nations (peoples). And the land of Canaan, given to Abraham and Isaac, will belong to his offspring after him as an everlasting possession.
    - That's the specific blessing that Jacob is referring to in vv3-4. **He's reminding us of the significance of this covenant blessing that's been passed down from Abraham to Isaac, Isaac to Jacob, and now from Jacob to Joseph's two sons.**
- ❖ But before he bestows that blessing, Jacob does the unexpected. **He essentially adopts his two grandsons as his own.** Counting them as his own sons. Granting them equal inheritance along with their uncles. Look at v5, *"And 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."*
- ❖ **Notice how, through this adoption, the two grandsons will effectively replace Jacob's first two sons in terms of inheritance.** Reuben is the eldest; Simeon is next. Previously in the story, we learned of how Reuben forfeited his firstborn rights when he slept with his father's concubine (Gen 35:22). And Simeon's hands were bloodied by his involvement in the massacre of the men of Shechem recorded back in Genesis 34.
  - **This is why Jacob is ready to give Joseph and his sons the double share that was traditionally reserved for the firstborn.** But that requires Jacob to officially adopt the grandsons – to become their father so they can enjoy the rights of sons. **Now did you notice how Jacob subtly flipped the order and named Ephraim before Manasseh?** That foreshadows what we'll see next when he's ready to bless them.
- ❖ But first look at v8. **Here we have language that you might find in an ancient adoption ceremony.** When Jacob asks Joseph, *"Who are these?"*, he's not ignorant of their identity. Seventeen years have passed for Jacob to get to know his grandsons. And they aren't children at this point. They're likely around twenty years old when they get adopted.
  - **So that question, "Who are these?" is rhetorical and part of the formal language in a ceremony.** It's like when I officiate a wedding and ask the father of the bride, "Who gives this woman to be married to this man?," I know the answer. I'm not feigning ignorance. That's part of the formality, where her father can answer, "Her mother and I." Similarly, Joseph knows how he's supposed to answer in v9.

- ❖ **And what we go on to read in the following verses are the gestures that formalize the adoption.** The grandsons are brought near to Jacob. They're placed – probably not literally on his knees – but next to them. And there Jacob “*kissed them and embraced them.*” (v10). Those are the same gestures in the Parable of the Prodigal Son when the father seeks to publicly reinforce that *this* young man is my son (Lk 15:20).
- ❖ **Friends, the whole point here is that Jacob's adoption of his grandsons and his granting them full inheritance rights is an act of faith on Jacob's part.** Because none of this matters if they never return to Canaan. If Jacob doesn't believe God's promise (Gen 46:4) that he'll, one day, bring him and his family back up from Egypt to the Promised Land – if he doesn't believe God will do it, then what does it matter to adopt Joseph's sons? **What does it matter to grant them full inheritance rights if there is no inheritance of land to give to any of his sons?** Much less two adopted ones.
- ❖ So for Jacob to go through the official steps to adopt Ephraim and Manasseh spoke volumes about his faith in God and his promises. **And if you think about it, it was an equally profound act of faith on Joseph's part to give up his sons in adoption.** His sons were half-Egyptian. They were born and raised in wealth and privilege within the highest echelons of Egyptian society. Their father was the second highest official in the land.
  - **But by going through this ceremony, by allowing Ephraim and Manasseh to become Israel's sons, that will effectively cut them off from all the power and privilege of Egyptian society.** They will be full Israelites from now on. If Joseph's top concern and highest priority was for his sons to succeed in this world – to achieve worldly wealth and status – then he wouldn't have supported the adoption. He would've raised them as Egyptians. **But by faith, he cared more about their spiritual future.** He cared more about their adoption into the family of God, into his chosen, covenant people. That's why he supported it.
- ❖ **Parents, what about you? What's your top concern, your highest priority for your children?** If it's their spiritual future, their adoption into the family of God, then it's going to take a profound act of faith on your part. **Because the choices you'll have to make that will best serve their spiritual future and heavenly good may not align with what appears to best serve their worldly success.** Don't be discouraged when you look at other families and their kids seem set up so well for success.
  - The question you need to ask is this: **What kind of success ultimately matters for my children? What kind of future am I preparing them for?** If it's just worldly success, if you're aiming for this life alone, then you don't need much faith. There are plenty of strategies you can employ to set your kids up for academic and worldly success. **But if your top concern is their spiritual future – their eternity with God – then you'll have to exercise faith.** Trusting him when he promises that if we train our kids to seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, that he'll take care of our kids better than we can. That he'll address those anxieties we naturally have for kids and for their earthly future (Mt 6:33). That's the kind of faith Joseph was exercising.

## Blessing Joseph's Sons

- ❖ So that's how great faith was present in the act of adopting Joseph's sons. Let's focus on the blessing of progeny and protection that Jacob bestows on them. Look at vv15-16. *"<sup>15</sup>And he blessed Joseph and 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, <sup>16</sup>the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys; 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.'"*
- ❖ Notice how the blessing ends with the expectation of progeny – of a large family. The brother and their offspring will be fruitful and multiply in the land. Which plays out in the subsequent books of the Bible that tell us that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh do end up bigger and more numerous than the other tribes.
  - But not only is this a blessing of progeny. **It's a blessing of protection.** Notice how the protective care of a good shepherd is emphasized. And God's identified with the angel of the LORD. This is the God who redeemed Jacob from all evil. It's to *this* God that Jacob appeals. Asking him to *"bless the boys."* With the same blessing passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and now to Ephraim and Manasseh.
- ❖ What's noteworthy is how Joseph tried to position his sons in such a way that Jacob's right hand – the favored hand – would naturally fall on Manasseh's head. Since he's the oldest. But Jacob doesn't comply. He crosses his hands. Look at v14, *"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)."*
  - Now we're told in v17 that that displeased Joseph. He tried to correct his father and place Jacob's right hand over Manasseh's head. Look at v18, *"<sup>18</sup>And Joseph said to his father, 'Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.' <sup>19</sup>But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know.'"*
- ❖ That's been a consistent theme in the economy of God. Where the first will be last and the last first (Mt 19:30). We've seen this unconventional pattern throughout the book of Genesis. Abel over Cain. Seth over Cain. Isaac over Ishmael. Jacob over Esau. Perez over Zerah. Joseph over his brothers. And now Ephraim over Manasseh.
  - **The point is that God's blessings don't operate according to conventional wisdom.** There's no tit-for-tat arrangement that promises if you just work hard, try your best, and stay honest and humble, then God will bless you with this or that. That's what conventional wisdom is going to tell you. But God's blessings operate on a very different principle. **When God blesses, he does so according to his grace.**
- ❖ Think about those two brothers in the Parable of the Prodigal Son. By the end of the story, conventional wisdom is challenged. The dutiful older brother, who never disobeyed his father's commands, who put his head down and served, never asking for anything, not even a young goat to celebrate with his friends – by the end of the story, this older brother ends up relationally further from his father compared to the younger brother.

- ❖ This reckless, licentious prodigal – but humbled by his sin – he’s the one who enjoys his father’s love and gets showered with blessings. **It’s a classic story of how grace flips our expectations.** Reminding us to look at life through eyes of faith, using the lens of grace.
- ❖ Because otherwise we’ll draw faulty conclusions. **If we just use the eyes of our flesh, they tell us that God’s blessing of progeny and protection are conclusive.** If God blesses you, then we assume you *will* have a large family and you *will* be protected from all evil. So on the flip side, if you aren’t fruitful with children or if you aren’t protected and experience a lot of hardship, then the eyes of the flesh will draw the conclusion that you must *not* be blessed.
  - But that hasn’t been the case in Genesis. That’s not how God’s blessings operate. **Abraham and Isaac received that blessing and both of them only had two sons.** That’s not a lot of progeny. **But through the eyes of faith and the lens of grace, you realize that Abraham truly is blessed.** He is a “father of multitudes” when you look beyond his lifetime and mere descendants of the flesh. Because if you’re a Christian, you’re a spiritual descendant of Abraham, and there’s a countless multitude of us!
- ❖ And look at Jacob’s life. **He received that blessing and yet he wasn’t protected from all evil.** No, he experienced his fair share of evil and hardship. He was cheated out of his first attempt to marry the love of his life. Then he lost his beloved wife at a fairly young age. Then he lost his beloved son that he bore with his beloved wife.
  - **On face value, using conventional wisdom, Jacob is *not* blessed.** If he were blessed, then none of those hardships should’ve happened. But Jacob looks through eyes of faith, so notice what he says in v16. Notice how he appeals to the God who “*has redeemed me from all evil.*” Jacob is *not* suggesting bad things never happened to him because he’s blessed. **No, he claims to worship a God who has redeemed those bad things that have happened to him. And that’s how he’s blessed.**
    - He’s saying that God has a deeper purpose and higher plan for these bad things in life. He’s doing something good and making something beautiful out of it. **Jacob understands that none of his pain was wasted.** None of his sorrow was pointless. God can and will redeem it.
- ❖ Friends, that could be true for you as well. **If you look to Jesus, through the eyes of faith, with the lens of grace, you can be assured that this same blessing of progeny and protection is yours.** Just remember that it won’t operate according to conventional wisdom.
  - Based on conventional wisdom, the world looks at your life, and if it sees a big, happy family living a comfortable, secure life, it concludes that you’re blessed. But if it sees a hard life, then it concludes you’re *not yet* blessed. You’re still on your way.
- ❖ **But according to the principle of grace, you *are* blessed not based on outcomes. But based on God’s faithful presence in your life.** He’ll shepherd you through the hardships. He’ll redeem your pain and sorrow. It won’t be for naught. There is a higher purpose he’s accomplishing. It takes eyes of faith to see it. Jacob had them. That’s why his act of blessing his grandsons was a powerful demonstration of faith.

## Giving Joseph Territory

- ❖ And the same could be said of his actions, in vv21-22, when he bequeathed a plot of land to Joseph specifically. Let's quickly conclude with a look at Jacob giving his beloved son some territory in the land of Canaan. Listen to vv21-22, *"<sup>21</sup>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. <sup>22</sup>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.'"*
  - This gift is ultimately an act of faith on Jacob's part. Since it would be meaningless if Joseph and his descendants go on to live forever in Egypt. **This act only carries weight and significance if Jacob is fully convinced, by faith, that the LORD will restore his entire family back to the Promised Land one day.** So along with bestowing the covenant blessing, he bequeaths the very little land he owns in Canaan.
- ❖ All of that takes tremendous faith. Think about it. Throughout the course of his 147 years on earth, Jacob doesn't see anything close to a fulfillment of the great promises and blessings passed down to him. **By the end of his life, all that he and his family – the chosen people of God – all that they can call *theirs*, in all the Promised Land, is just a tiny family burial plot and the side of a mountain, where the town of Shechem is located.** God blessed them with all this vast land, and yet in reality all they own is a tiny, tiny fraction. And, at this moment, they're not even in the Promised Land. They're far away in Egypt.
  - But Jacob cannot deny that God's faithful presence has been with him in every place, in every moment. **So he blesses and bequeaths in faith. Trusting that God will one day bring his children and his children's children home.** That's an act of faith.
- ❖ Parents, again I speak to you. Ask yourself: **What's the greatest blessing you can give to your children? What's the most prized possession you can bequeath them?** Conventional wisdom would point to your estate, your investment portfolio, a trust fund, a sizable inheritance. That's what we're told is the greatest blessing you can give to your kids.
  - **But in God's economy, the greatest blessing you can give them are his covenant promises.** Pass them down to your children. Speak freely of them. Tell them about how God in Christ promises to forgive our sins. To wash us clean. To give us a new heart and to put his Spirit within us. To be with us to the end of the age. To prepare a place for us in his Father's house, and to come again, to personally usher us home.
- ❖ Those are the precious promises that belong to you – if you are in Christ Jesus. **Which means your greatest act of faith would be to pass them down to your children and your children's children.** Even if they look far from being fulfilled in your life or in your lifetime. Walk by faith and bless your kids with those promises, trusting that the God, who can once before, will return again in a Second Advent to fetch us and bring us to our heavenly home.