

TORAHSCOPE: VaYechi (And he lived)

by Mark Huey posted 09 January, 2009 www.outreachisrael.net

Genesis 47:28-50:26
1 Kings 2:1-12

“Blessing Israel”

“**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 to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, **bless the lads;** and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth’” (Genesis 48:15-16).

This week’s *parashah* brings us to the end of the Book of Genesis. For twelve weeks, the first book of the Torah has instructed us about life from the beginning of the Creation to the emphasis on one family that has been chosen to be the Creator’s representative to the nations of the world. From Adam to Noah to Abraham and finally Jacob, the Holy One of Israel progressively describes how He works through individuals to accomplish His will for the created order. Now as the first book comes a close, the Patriarch Jacob, inheritor of the covenants and blessings bestowed upon Abraham and Isaac, is now in a position to extend those same blessings to his progeny who constitute the nation of Israel.

So many lessons can be learned from this week’s portion. After all, Jacob is in a unique position to not only bless his sons, but also declare prophetically the future destiny of his offspring. Great lessons for the followers of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are being imparted by this graphic example of extending ones blessings upon his children. Interestingly, the Epistle to the Hebrews indicates that by following the example established by Isaac, Jacob was exhibiting the great faith that he also had in the God of his fathers:

“By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, even regarding things to come. By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff’ (Hebrews 11:20-21).

In many respects, the concept of faithfully blessing your children, in order to pass on the blessings you have received, is reinforced and categorically established by the actions described in this week’s reading. Thankfully, the faithful Believers who have inherited those blessings are even today reaping the benefits of those blessings. Hopefully, as a result, we will continue to pass them on to future generations.

The Double Blessing

As you begin to study and reflect upon some of the details of this reading, you can pick up some of the subtle statements that indicate that Jacob, just like his fathers Abraham and Isaac, was gifted with prophetic insight about the future of his children and their offspring. If you will remember, Jacob was 130 years old when he arrived in Egypt and he lived there for seventeen years until his death:

“And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob’s life was one hundred and forty-seven years” (Genesis 47:28).

During his sojourn in Egypt, Jacob had a substantial amount of time to reflect upon his life experiences and how they had led him to his final days outside of the land promised to him and his descendants. No doubt as he considered all of life’s trials and tribulations, he thought about his twelve sons and how they had behaved over the years. He probably remembered some of the dreams that Joseph had shared with him and Rachel years earlier in Canaan, and now he was witnessing their fulfillment. Now, as he approaches death, he desires to finalize his estate.

First, Jacob is very concerned about his final resting place. As his body begins to fail, he is compelled to commit Joseph to a pledge to return his remains to the Land of Canaan:

“When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, ‘Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. **Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.**’ And he said, ‘I will do as you have said.’ And he said, ‘Swear to me.’ So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed” (Genesis 47:29-31).

Jacob had a very special relationship with the God of his fathers. The various encounters over the years, and now the opportunity to be circumspect, allowed him to conclude that it was imperative that he have his body laid to rest in the tomb of his fathers. After all, he might have reasoned, he had watched Isaac place Abraham in a tomb he had purchased in Machpelah, and then he in turn had placed Isaac in that same tomb. And since Jacob had also been promised Canaan as an inheritance, it would only be natural for him to be laid to rest in the same tomb. Since Joseph ostensibly had the power to fulfill this request, Jacob secured a vow from Joseph.

Once this request was granted, Jacob was probably content to finish off the days of his life. We soon discover that the number of Jacob’s days were coming to a close and he now goes into action to repeat many of the actions that he had witnessed his father Isaac perform decades earlier. Jacob understood the important principles of the birthright blessings. After all, some of the most memorable events of his life centered around the challenges of the one who would receive the birthright inheritance and the blessing of Isaac. Of course, we remember that in the case of Jacob and Esau, in spite of the fact that Esau was the elder son, Jacob received both the birthright blessings and the leadership blessings for his generation. Now as death approached, Jacob has the opportunity to pass onto his sons, and as we also discover, his grandsons, the different blessings that he prophetically declared to each.

First, the issue of the double portion blessing to the eldest is extended. As you remember, Jacob has had a very full life that included multiple wives and multiple concubines. It is the son of Rachel, the beloved Joseph, whom Jacob designates as the heir of the birthright blessings. As we read in this account, Joseph has two sons and we witness Jacob actually adopting them as his own. In a unique way, by in essence making them his own, he passes the double portion onto Joseph through his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim:

“Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, ‘Behold, your father is sick.’ **So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him.** When it was told to Jacob, ‘Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,’ Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.” **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.** But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).’ **When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, ‘Who are these?’ And Joseph said to his father, ‘They are my sons, whom God has given me here.’ So he said, ‘Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.**’ Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, ‘I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well.’ Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. **And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the first-born.** 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 to this day, **the angel who has redeemed**

me from all evil, Bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth” (Genesis 48:1-16).

In this classic passage, the birthright blessings of Jacob are extended to the two sons of Joseph. But in a somewhat confusing manner, due to the inspiration of the moment, the younger son Ephraim actually receives the greater blessing that is typically extended to the elder son of each generation. Somehow during this intriguing moment of blessing, Jacob is prompted to cross his arms and place his right hand upon the head of Ephraim. As Jacob places his name, and the names of Abraham and Isaac upon the two lads, he declares some awesome blessings. First, he states that the two of them will grow into a multitude in the midst of the Earth. But then we note that Joseph is somewhat confused. He is wondering if his elderly father has made a mistake about to whom he is extending his blessings:

“When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this one is the first-born. Place your right hand on his head.’ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people and he also shall be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.’ And he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!”’ Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh” (Genesis 48:17-20).

We read in the narrative that Jacob is not confused at all. He categorically declares, “I know, my son, I know,” two times, so as not to be misunderstood. Jacob was able to see into the future, to not only see what was going to befall these two lads’ descendants, but also bless them according to the preeminence that they would each inherit. This was a very powerful event in the life of the nation of Israel. The ramifications of this blessing continue to this very day, and of course are all a part of the plan of redemption and restoration that I believe we are beginning to witness even now.

Blessing versus Befalling

As we continue on in the reading, we find that Jacob soon thereafter is ready to make his prophetic declarations and blessings upon the rest of his sons:

“Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, ‘Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come. Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; and listen to Israel your father” (Genesis 49:1-2).

The aged Jacob now looks out over his sons and reflects upon each one, and to a degree summarizes their lives, making declarations about what he sees for them in the future. If you take these prophecies and compliment them with additional prophecies that are declared generations later at the end of the Book of Deuteronomy, you can actually discern an accurate depiction of what the future holds for the various sons of Israel and their progeny. This is a fascinating study, and one that verifies the veracity of the prophetic word that comes forth from the lips of Jacob. Interestingly though, as you read the text, you note that as Jacob summons his sons, is really calling them together to describe what he sees about the future of each tribe that will come after them. The statement, “befall you in the days to come,” is his declaration that these words are prophetic in nature.

Without going into great detail, Jacob is, at this critical point prior to his death, speaking for the Holy One. The one single declaration he makes—that stands out above the rest—I believe is embodied in the prophecy and the blessing that is given to Judah. As you will recall, it is Judah among the eleven brothers, who in recent portions had been exhibiting the leadership traits that Jacob recognizes, who is placed above the others for the inheritance of the ruler’s position. Jacob states it like this:

“Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you

have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? **The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes,** and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk” (Genesis 49:8-12).

For His Divine purposes, the Holy One decides that for the ultimate benefit of His people, two prominent tribes and their descendants will in the future be raised up to lead the followers. First, the sons of Joseph will receive the double portion blessings of the birthright, and then Judah will receive the responsibilities of the scepter of leadership. Somehow in His infinite wisdom, the sharing of these responsibilities will be the most effective way to accomplish His will for not only Israel, but ultimately the entire world.

As we look back at these verses with the illumination of revelation about what the Father is restoring today, the wisdom of this plan is beyond the ingenuity of humanity. Indeed, this is only supernatural wisdom that has taken into consideration all of the vagaries of humanity and concocted a plan that works in spite of the wiles of the world, the flesh, and the devil. Once you understand that Judah and Ephraim have been uniquely blessed in order to bring about the restoration, all of the additional prophecies that point to this reality make sense. Classic verses that are uttered from the likes of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, and Zechariah are understandable:

“Then the jealousy of Ephraim will depart, and those who harass Judah will be cut off; Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah, and Judah will not harass Ephraim” (Isaiah 11:13).

“Say to them, “Thus says the Lord GOD, “Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel, his companions; and I will put them with it, with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they will be one in My hand”” (Ezekiel 37:19).

“Moreover, the pride of Israel testifies against him, and Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity; Judah also has stumbled with them. They will go with their flocks and herds to seek the LORD, but they will not find Him; He has withdrawn from them” (Hosea 5:5-6).

“For I will bend Judah as My bow, I will fill the bow with Ephraim. And I will stir up your sons, O Zion, against your sons, O Greece; and I will make you like a warrior's sword” (Zechariah 9:13).

For some Divine reasons, the balance of the two entities witnessing and ultimately coming back together, testify who the One True God is and will eventually constitute the restoration that the Prophets have all declared (Acts 3:19-24). In the meantime, the blessings seem to work in concert as prophetic declarations befall all those who are a part of Israel.

Blessing Our Own

What can we learn from these rich verses as Genesis comes to a close? Are there principles that we can embrace about blessings that will be beneficial to our children and us in our respective walks with the Messiah Yeshua?

First, it is important to understand the power of blessing. As parents who are responsible for the next generation and the continuation of the faith that has been passed down for generations, the benefits of blessing our children has been modeled throughout the Scriptures. We have seen the Holy One bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and then in turn the Patriarchs blessing their children. Of course, as we have read the blessings throughout the Book of Genesis, we are quick to note that all of the Patriarchs have been Divinely guided in the proclamation of their blessings over their various offspring. Whether it is Abraham blessing Isaac or Ishmael, or Isaac blessing Jacob or Esau, or Jacob blessing his sons and grandsons, the one constant thing that you will note is that each of these fathers was uniquely tuned into what God's will was for his respective children. Each one listened and heard the still quiet voice of the Lord as He communicated the blessings and the future determined for their children. They in turn, at the appointed times, were then able to pass on the blessings to the succeeding generation. You can imagine how the sons of Israel responded when they heard that Jacob was “summoning” them to come and hear what would befall them in the days to come:

“Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, ‘Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come’” (Genesis 49:1).

The expectation to hear a 147 year-old father declare his final words over you has to be one of the highlights of this son’s life. These were powerful words that were going to declare the destiny of your own seed. Perhaps we should take this pattern to heart, and in a similar way desire to pass our blessings down upon our own children.

But one of the challenges we all have is that we do not know the day or hour of our departure from this world. Even though there is a certain degree of wisdom to store up your insights and wisdom for the end of your days—to perhaps give your children a peek at what you see them doing in the future—in the interim it is also extremely beneficial to bless your children on a regular basis. This is why the Jewish people have taken to heart the admonition given to Joseph and the others about blessing their children like Ephraim and Manasseh:

“And he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel shall pronounce blessing, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!’” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh” (Genesis 48:20).

The traditional Jewish prayer is to declare that the material blessings of the double portion that was given to Ephraim and Manasseh should be prayed over your children on a regular basis. Typically the fathers say this prayer over the Jewish boys on a weekly basis. In like manner, the fathers then would declare over their daughters the blessings of Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. By declaring these blessings over their sons and daughters, the Jewish people are essentially passing on a tradition that finds its root in these very passages. The benefits to the children being blessed are unimaginable.

If there is anything you might want to consider this week as you reflect on this Torah portion, you might want to think about blessing your children. Let them know how much you care for them and how much potential you see in them being exercised. Blessing children for good works accomplished has a far greater return than condemning them for opportunities missed or reminding them of their failures and shortcomings. Receiving statements of blessings from parents is something that most children cherish. On the other hand, the accounts of those who do not receive statements of blessing are filled with feelings of regret and remorse for not hearing the comforting and loving statements of blessing from parents.

While you are developing a habit of blessing your children, you might be considering the important words that you might want to impart as you continue to age and approach your own death. Leaving children with a legacy and a hope for their future is quite a blessing in itself. It is also quite possible that as you pursue your relationship with the Lord, He just might impart to you, through His still small voice, a vision of what your children will be doing in the future. Then you, like Jacob, might have the opportunity to place a blessing for a hope and a future upon your descendants.

As He has blessed us through the life of Jacob and his sons, may we continue to bless Him through our perseverance in the things of the faith that we have received. And by faith, may we like Jacob, pour out His blessings upon our children so that all of our families will be blessed!

Mark Huey (B.A., Vanderbilt University in History and Graduate Studies at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University) is the Director of Outreach Israel Ministries (www.outreachisrael.net). He is the author of several books, including: *TorahScope, Volumes I & II*, and *Counting the Omer: A Daily Devotional Toward Shavuot*. He is also co-author of *Hebraic Roots: An Introductory Study*.

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard, Updated Edition* (NASU), © 1995, published by The Lockman Foundation.