

Dr. Kenneth Mathews, Genesis, Session 25

Jacob's Blessings, Joseph's Sons, and Deaths of Jacob and Joseph (Genesis 48-50)

Author: Dr. Kenneth Mathews | Session Number: Session 25

Source: Biblicalelearning.org by Ted Hildebrandt

Keywords

Genesis, Jacob's blessings, adoption, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, Shiloh, covenant, death of Jacob, death of Joseph

Abstract

Dr. Kenneth Mathews analyzes the final chapters of Genesis (chapters 48-50), which bring the patriarch's narrative to its grand conclusion with the deaths of Jacob and Joseph. He examines Jacob's adoption and blessing of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, emphasizing the recurring theme of the younger sibling taking precedence over the older. Mathews also reviews Jacob's prophetic blessings of his twelve sons, particularly focusing on the messianic significance of the scepter promise to Judah. Finally, the session explores the burials of Jacob and Joseph, illustrating God's enduring covenantal love and the theological bridge these events construct toward the book of Exodus.

Outline

I. Introduction to the Conclusion of Genesis (Genesis 48-50)

- A. Literary structure: Merging of the Joseph narrative (chapters 46-47) with the final patriarchal conclusions (chapters 48-50).
- B. Key characters: Jacob, Joseph, and Judah as the primary figures driving the conclusion.
- C. Primary theological themes:
 - 1. God's good purposes for creation, blessing, and personal relationship established in Genesis 1:26-28.
 - 2. Renewal of the three promissory elements (blessing, descendants, and land) in the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3).
 - 3. Enduring Pentateuchal theme of God's elective love, choosing a specific family to reach all nations (Deuteronomy 7:7-8, 12).
- D. Joseph as the mediator of preservation and salvation during the global famine.

II. Jacob's Blessing and Adoption of Joseph's Sons (Genesis 48)

A. Adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh:

1. Joseph's concern over his sons' lineage, born in Egypt to an Egyptian mother.
2. Jacob's historical recollection of God Almighty's (El Shaddai) appearance and blessing at Luz (Bethel).
3. Formal adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh, granting them equal inheritance status to Reuben and Simeon.

B. The theological role of Jacob's alternative name, Israel:

1. Play on physical blindness vs. spiritual insight, echoing Jacob's own history with Esau without the element of trickery.

C. The crossing of Jacob's hands in blessing:

1. Positioning of the sons: Manasseh (firstborn) on Jacob's right, Ephraim (younger) on Jacob's left.
2. Jacob crossing his hands to place his right hand on Ephraim, conferring the greater blessing on the younger sibling.
3. Refusal to correct the position, prophesying Ephraim's future tribal dominance in the northern kingdom.

D. Jacob's final words to Joseph: Reassurance of God's presence, the return to Canaan, and the inheritance of Shechem (the ridge of land).

III. Jacob's Prophetic Blessings of the Twelve Sons (Genesis 49:1-28)

A. The deathbed assembly: Gathering the sons to reveal what will happen 'in days to come.'

B. Prophetic 'days to come' as a major literary seam in the Pentateuch (alongside Numbers 24:14 and Deuteronomy 31:29).

C. The individual tribal sayings:

1. Reuben: Condemned for instability and incest with Bilhah; loses preeminence.
2. Simeon and Levi: Rebuked for violence at Shechem; scattered within Israel (Simeon absorbed by Judah, and Levi scattered without land inheritance).
3. Judah: Blessed as a strong lion's cub and the ancestor of the royal line of kings.
 - a. Messianic and Davidic Covenant connections (2 Samuel 7, Revelation 5:5).
 - b. Interpretation of Genesis 49:10 ('Shiloh' vs. 'tribute' vs. 'he to whom it belongs').
4. Zebulun, Issachar, and Dan: Prophetic sayings on their regional inheritance and a personal prayer of deliverance by Jacob.
5. Gad, Asher, and Naphtali: Short poetic declarations of regional prosperity and strength.
6. Joseph: Described as a fruitful vine who overcomes severe attacks through the strength of 'Shaddai' (the Almighty) and the 'Mighty One of Jacob.'
7. Benjamin: Poetic depiction of strength.

D. Summary of the blessings: Promotes tribal unity, ensuring no tribe is left out, and anticipating the land distribution in Joshua.

IV. The Death, Mourning, and Burial of Jacob (Genesis 49:29 - 50:14)

- A. Jacob's command: Obligating his sons to bury him in the family tomb at the cave of Machpelah in Canaan.
- B. Ritual mourning in Egypt: Embalming process (40 days) and royal mourning period (70 days) demonstrating Egyptian reverence.
- C. The royal burial procession: Egyptian and familial escort of Jacob's body to Atad near the Jordan.
- D. Canaanite observation: Naming the site Abel Mitzrayim ('mourning of Egypt'), illustrating Israel's prominent influence among near and distant nations.

V. Joseph's Final Days, Reconciliation, and Death (Genesis 50:15-26)

- A. The brothers' lingering fear: Requesting forgiveness for their past sins under the name of Jacob.
- B. Joseph's emotional and theological response:
 - 1. Joseph's weeping at their lack of trust.
 - 2. The brothers bowing in fulfillment of Joseph's childhood dreams.
 - 3. Theological synthesis of providence: 'You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good.'
- C. Joseph's deathbed oath: Requiring the sons of Israel to carry his bones back to Canaan when God delivers them.
- D. The death and embalming of Joseph at 110 years: Creating a narrative bridge that points directly to the Exodus.

VI. Concluding Theological Reflections

- A. The typological fulfillment: Jesus Christ, arising from the line of Judah, as the perfect mediator of the patriarchal promises.
- B. Convergence of the Pentateuchal themes of creation, covenant, elective love, and world-wide salvation.