

Community Bible Church

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 48

Genesis chapter 48 tells the story of the elderly and infirm patriarch, **Jacob**, and his interactions with his son, **Joseph**, and two of his grandsons, **Manasseh** and **Ephraim**. **Jacob** is also called **Israel** and these two names are often used interchangeably.

Jacob was born to the patriarch **Isaac** in around 2100 BC and died at 147 years of age. Jacob (Israel) had 12 sons with four wives--Leah and Rachel, and their two servants, Bilhah and Zilpah (**Genesis 35**). Only Joseph and Benjamin were born to his beloved wife, **Rachel**, who had died in Canaan during the birth of Benjamin.

In **chapter 48**, the narrative consists almost entirely of Jacob's adoption and blessing of these two grandsons, **Manasseh** and **Ephraim**. One sees the patriarch giving the **birthright** (inheritance) as well as the more informal and prophetic **blessing**. The chapter may be outlined as follows:

Jacob Adopts Joseph's Two Sons **48:1-7**
Jacob Anoints (blesses) These Two Sons **48:8-22**

One of the keys to understanding **chapter 48** is to recognize that by Jacob's actions in the chapter, the identity and configuration of the "twelve tribes of Israel" is altered. Originally, these twelve tribes would be led and identified by the names of Jacob's twelve sons. However, based on **chapter 48**, Joseph is given a double honor for his faithful service, and this inheritance is passed down to his two sons. Thus, both **Manasseh** and **Ephraim**, not Joseph, will be identified with tribes that would eventually return to Israel. Levi would be identified separately with a priestly, not geographic, tribe. Thus, two of the original sons would not be identified with these 12 tribes and Manasseh and Ephraim would replace them in the history of the twelve tribes of Israel.

1. Read the opening passage of **chapter 48** in **verses 1-7**. The elderly and infirm Jacob seems to have three things on his mind that he wants to convey to Joseph and Joseph's sons. These are: **(1)** What God had previously revealed to him (**verses 3-4**). **(2)** His desire to adopt his grandsons as his own (**verses 5-6**). **(3)** His love for Rachel (**verse 7**). Write a summary of each of these three topics that were of importance to Jacob.

2. Read the next section in **48:8-14**. This is an emotional narrative of a loving and grateful grandfather showing love to his grandsons, whom he may not have known well. The exact ages of these boys is not unknown but they may have been teenagers. Describe what takes place in this passage. What occurred in **48:14**?

Note: This is the fifth example in the Old Testament where the traditional practice of *primogeniture* is ignored. Manasseh, the eldest, should have received the primary blessing. Primogeniture is the system of inheritance where property, or blessing, is passed on to the first born child. Jacob did not make a mistake. God chooses to bless he who is the least, rather than the greatest. Recall that Jacob himself received the blessing rather than Esau, the first born. Jesus teaches a related principle. This concept permeates patriarchal Old Testament history as God acts in grace and not in tradition.

3. How did Joseph react in **48:17-18** when he noticed that Jacob had “crossed-up” the blessing protocol? How did Jacob respond in **48:19**?

4. Read **48:15-16** where Jacob gives a heart-felt, three-fold invocation to God in his blessing of Joseph (**15**) and “*the lads*” (**16**). (Note that in **verse 17**, the “angel” most likely refers to the Son of God as the Angel of God.) Many see these verses in **48:15-16** as a Trinitarian blessing-prayer. Is Jacob extolling the Trinity in this beautiful passage?

5. From **48:21**, what prophesy was uttered by Jacob (Israel) in his final days that ultimately would be fulfilled by the tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim? When would this occur?

6. What most impressed you from your study of **Genesis chapter 48**?