

Jacob, their aging Patriarch, seems to have settled down contentedly among his sons in their settlement in Egypt. Little is told of those years, but they thrived and multiplied. Jacob had a lot of time to think. Feeling his age, he had begun to make provisions for his passing. He had first obtained a solemn vow from Joseph that he would be buried in the tomb in the field Abraham, his grandfather, had purchased back in Canaan.

Then Jacob fell ill. Coming to his father's side, Joseph had brought along his two sons. They were probably in their low twenties. Their grandfather Jacob, though weak, marshaled his strength to sit up. Hebrews 11 speaks of him worshiping upon his staff. He had important matters to deal with. As he spoke to Joseph at length he reviewed his life and the blessings he had received from God Almighty. Joseph's sons were there listening. They had been born and raised in Egypt to an Egyptian mother. But Jacob urgently wanted them to know and embrace their godly heritage as his grandsons. He wanted them to hear God's promises to him and his progeny and embrace them as their own. Canaan was their own God given and everlasting possession. He was shifting their natural thoughts of homeland away from Egypt to Canaan. Similarly God shifts the believer's inborn selfish, worldly heritage to His heavenly heritage and viewpoint.

Jacob then sealed his stated goal by actually adopting them as his own sons. This transaction was taken in fulfillment of the double blessing traditionally given the firstborn son. Though the younger of twins, Jacob had valued the birthright more than his "profane" elder brother, Esau, who had despised it, Hebrews 12. Jacob had opportunistically "purchased" it from him for a bowl of cooked vegetables. Later, though deceived by his deceptive uncle Laban and given Leah first, he clearly had regarded Rachel as his one and only love. Joseph was the firstborn son of his first love. In his heart and mind Joseph was truly his eldest. He granted the double blessing to Joseph, adopting Joseph's sons as his own. Each was to have the same status among the children of Israel as the eleven. And they did.

Jacob's remarkable action, blessing Ephraim, the younger, was no accident. Though blind, he had deliberately crossed his arms, overruling Joseph's intent. No descendant of Manasseh could claim Ephraim had stolen the blessing from him and claim the throne.

Ephraim was the ancestor of Joshua, the great leader of the Israelites, as they finally entered and took possession of Canaan. Centuries later, when God stripped most of the kingdom away from Judah after Solomon's indiscretions, it became known as Ephraim. Its first king was Jeroboam, an Ephraimite. The prophets, after the division of Israel, often called the northern kingdom Ephraim.

Jacob dearly wanted his grandsons to know their grandmother, Rachel. She, the love of his life, was a motive behind his adopting them as sons. Sitting there he fondly recalled her last hours with him. He precisely described the

location where she passed from him and where he had buried her. There remains a tomb there near Bethlehem even now. Herod's wicked slaughter of the wee ones of Bethlehem called up a prophesy citing Rachel, given in Jeremiah 31:15, cited in Matthew 2:17.

When Jacob chose to grant Ephraim the birthright he was perpetuating an interesting, far reaching trend. Neither Abraham, Isaac or Jacob had been firstborn but were chosen by God to bear the blessing due the firstborn. Abel, Shem, Moses and David were not firstborn either. God seems to delight in the second born.. Jesus, though Mary's firstborn, is characterized as the "Second Man" by God. "The First man," Adam, fathered the whole sinful race of men that the second Adam died to redeem.

*1 Corinthians 15:45 And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. 47 The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven.*

*Romans 5:12 Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:*

*15 . . . But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. (But read Romans 5:12 - 21.)*

*1 Corinthians 15:20 But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept. 21 For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. 23 But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.*

Jacob's first blessing called down the blessing of the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, referring to Him as the Angel who had fed him (KJV). Better translations have "the One that shepherded me." (When Jesus told Peter, feed my sheep, He meant the fuller meaning of the word "feed," "shepherd my sheep.") Jacob had been a shepherd all his life. He knew what that meant and was citing God's faithfulness as his Shepherd (as David later in Psalm 23). God had been faithful even while Jacob had seemed largely to ignore Him. Now he seemed to have come to realize how God had shadowed him and guarded him and protected him as He had first promised. This despite Jacob's nature and habit of fending for himself and bargaining with God. The old man now was blessing as he had been blessed. And perhaps he was more aware of the resentment his early favoritism for Joseph had provoked in his other sons. He carefully asserted his right to bless Joseph above the others.

He then specifically granted the land he had purchased in Shechem to Joseph's younger son Ephraim. Jacob's sons had undertaken to punish the city that harbored an eminent young man who had brazenly defiled their sister. He had now taken ownership of the attack that had so distressed him. He was safe and at peace, and no longer fearful.

By Ronald Canner, March 9, 2011