

Death, the Angel, and the Blessing

- ¹ After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.
- ² And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.
- ³ And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,
- ⁴ and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.'
- ⁵ 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.
- ⁶ And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.
- ⁷ As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."
- ⁸ When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?"
- ⁹ Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them."
- ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them.
- ¹¹ And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also."

- ¹² Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.
- ¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him.
- ¹⁴ 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).
- ¹⁵ 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,
- ¹⁶ 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."
- ¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head.
- ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head."
- ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations."
- ²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'" Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.
- ²¹ 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.
- ²² 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."

Genesis 48:1-22

The Grim Reaper

All of us either have or will have to deal with death. It is simply unavoidable. I can remember as a child being relatively spared from thinking about the Grim Reaper, other than in my own thoughts. My first grandparent didn't die until I was 26. My parents are alive to this day. None of their brothers or sisters have yet died either. So as a child, when I did face death it was as a fairly far removed observer. I can remember being more frightened of hospitals and old looking people than I was of death. Those were more real to me. It is a great blessing not to be confronted with death on a personal level as a young one, should God so grant it.

Nevertheless, I am now 45. I have probably lived half my life. All my grandparents have now fallen asleep. Add to this the fact that I'm a pastor, and I see my fair share of death from those close to me in the congregation. Each of us is one day closer to meeting our Maker than we were the day before. And you only have so many days on this earth. Even the very youngest among us have a limited number of days.

The purpose here is not to be morbid on this little resurrection Lord's Day. Yet, we are called to be sober

mindful when we come into the house of the Lord. We are called to remember our place as we consider our Maker. The Bible presents us with death on a regular basis in part to help prepare us for eternity. It gives us instructions on how to think about it, while forcing us to think about it even if we don't want to.

I've been thinking about death a little more than normal this week for a couple of reasons. First, as we speak, my first blood uncle/aunt is getting close to meeting the Lord face to face (though as of this writing, he has recovered in a remarkable way). We visited him in the hospital, and though he is one of the hardest fighters I've ever seen, wanting to stay around for his wife and grandchild, I could see in his eyes that he grows weary. I spoke with him a little about dying. I read the Scriptures to him. My family has been thinking about death then for this reason.

But second, the passage today opens up the final three chapters of Genesis. It begins with this theme, “So after this, Joseph was told, ‘Behold, your father is ill’” ([Gen 48:1](#)). It was such an overlap with reality, that I read this chapter to my uncle in hospice. From here, the passage will go on to tell us about [the last words of Jacob](#)—the last of

the three great patriarchs of Israel. Two full chapters will give us his final words. But eventually, come the final chapter of the book, Jacob will fall asleep as will his son Joseph and we will have passed out of the Genesis of humanity and of the nation of Israel once and for all. So let us enter this sacred space now with Joseph, as we consider the last days of his father Jacob, and the beginning of what will be a lengthy final monologue from this most wonderfully colorful character in Genesis.

Jacob the Senile?

The chapter is pretty straight forward, though there are a few fascinating things to discuss. It is the first of seven scenes that complete the book of Genesis:

- Scene 1: Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh (48:1–22)
 - Introduction (1–2)
 - Past promises fulfilled: burial of relatives (3–7)
 - Introduction of Ephraim and Manasseh (8–10)
 - Ephraim blessed more than Manasseh (11–20)
 - Instructions about his own burial (21–22)
- Scene 2: Jacob blesses his sons and dies (49:1–50:1)
 - Introduction (1–2)
 - Tribal blessings (3–28)
 - Instructions about burial (29–32)
 - Jacob dies (33–50:1)
- Scene 3: Jacob is embalmed and mourned (50:2–3)
- Scene 4: Pharaoh grants permission for Jacob's burial in Canaan (50:4–6)
- Scene 5: Jacob buried in ancestral grave (50:7–14)
- Scene 6: Joseph reassures his brothers (50:15–21)
- Scene 7: Joseph's last deeds and words (50:22–26)¹

¹ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 460.

There are two main concerns of Jacob. First, he should be buried in the patriarchal tomb in Canaan (48:7, 21–22; 49:29–32; 50:5–14, cf. 25). Second, the future destiny of his sons is at stake (48:8–49:28). This consumes Jacob, because he knows his days are coming to an end and he must see the covenantal promises of God pass to the next generation. In our chapter, the focus will be on two sons that no one would have expected.

The chapter begins with the words “after this...” We knew from the last chapter that Jacob was 130 years old when he was presented to Pharaoh. We know from the last chapter that he is 147 when he dies. Thus, approximately 17 years have passed here. Jacob has become very ill. So when Joseph the mighty ruler of Egypt hears about it, he takes his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and goes to his father (Gen 48:1).

Jacob is now told that Joseph has come to visit. He knows it will be the last time he sees his beloved son. Therefore, it says, “Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed” (vs. 2). I’ve seen this many times. You visit someone who seemed to those closest to them to be at the precipice of death, when suddenly, news of visitors arrives

and they back away from the edge. Such is the power of the will God gave us. We fight with all our strength not to die. Jacob cannot die yet. He has business to attend to first.

When the three men got there (Manasseh and Ephraim are now certainly young men), Jacob began to talk. He begins by remembering an event long ago in his past, when he was himself much younger. It has the feeling of a covenant preamble. He said to Joseph, “**God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me**” (3). “God Almighty” is the famous “**El Shaddai,**” or God of the Mountain. The name is only found three times in Genesis.

It was the name God took in **Genesis 35:11** when he told Jacob at Bethel (which used to be called Luz), “**I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body**” (**Gen 35:11**). Thus, Jacob tells Joseph what God said to him, “**Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession**” (**48:4**).

This in turn was told to Jacob so that he would understand that this was the same **God**, the same **covenant**,

and the same **promise** that was given to his grandfather. “‘I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly.’ Then Abram fell on his face. And God said to him, ‘Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations’” (**Gen 17:1-4**). Do you hear the similarities? There is much in this chapter that remembers past parts of Genesis.²

Thus, God’s name here serves to remind us one more time in Genesis of the covenant making God, the God of gods, the God of promises, the God of remembering, the God of power to carry out what he has sworn. Jacob may be old, Jacob may be in Egypt, but none of this can thwart God’s plan. And notice also, that plan is about “**offspring**.” As has been throughout Genesis, the word remains “**seed**.” God has not even forgotten his promises to Eve or Noah to

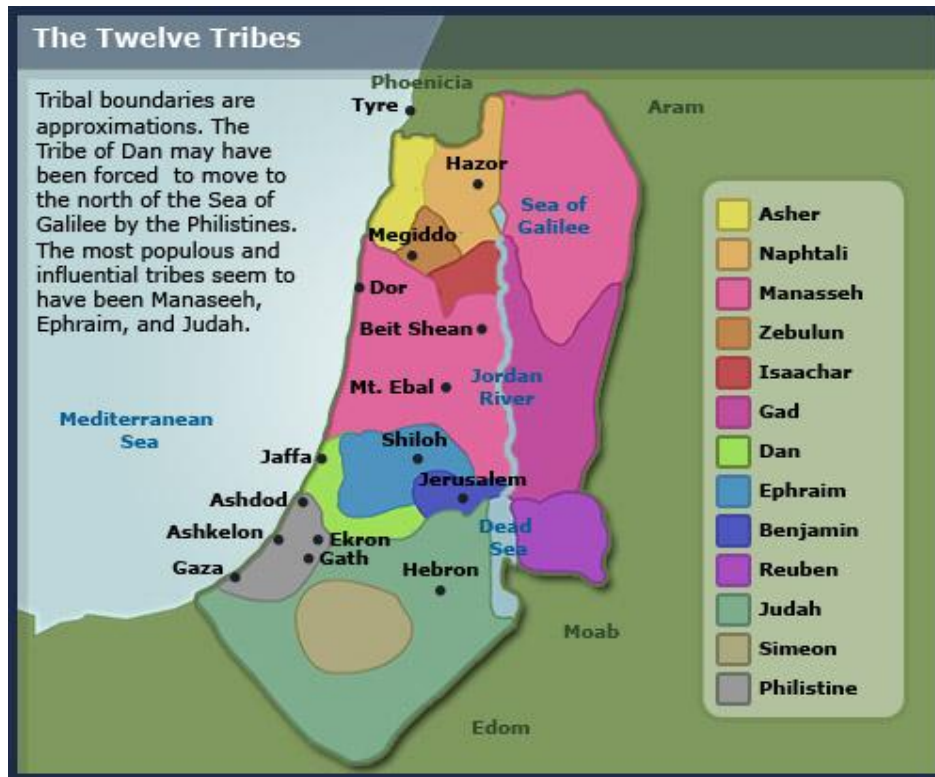
² Wenham’s list is impressive: “Compare 48:5 to 41:50–52; 29:32–33; cf. 48:7 to 35:9, 16–19; cf. 48:9 to 41:50–52; cf. 48:11 to 37:33–35; 45:28; cf. 48:14 to 27:27–28; cf. 48:15 to 13:17; 17:1; 26:3; 28:15, 20–21; cf. 48:22 to 34:25–29; cf. 49:3 to 29:32; cf. 49:4 to 35:22; cf. 49:5 to 29:33–34; cf. 40:5–7 to 34:25–31; cf. 49:8 to 29:35; cf. 49:13 to 30:20; cf. 49:14 to 30:18; cf. 49:16 to 30:6; cf. 49:19 to 30:11; cf. 49:20 to 30:13; cf. 49:21 to 30:8; cf. 49:22 to 30:24; cf. 49:27 to 35:18; cf. 49:29–32 to 23:2–20; cf. 49:31 to 25:9; 35:29; cf. 50:1 to 46:29; cf. 50:4 to 47:1; cf. 50:5–6 to 24:3, 37; 47:31; cf. 50:8 to 45:10; 46:28, 34; 47:1, 4, 6; cf. 50:9 to 41:43; cf. 50:13 to 23:2–20; cf. 50:15 to 27:41; 37:18–35; cf. 50:17 to 31:36; cf. 50:18 to 44:14, 16; cf. 50:20 to 45:5, 7–9; cf. 50:21 to 45:11; 47:12; 37:35; 34:3; cf. 50:24 to 48:21; 50:5; 22:16; 26:3; 35:12; cf. 50:25 to 24:3, 37; 47:31; 50:5–6).” Wenham, 461.

give them a seed that would crush the head of the serpent or overcome the torrents of death.

Thus, the Bible and Jacob in particular now, must find a way to continue this covenant promise before he passes on into eternity. This will involve his sons. Though the rest of his sons will join him in the next chapter, for now, it is only Joseph and Jacob's two grandchildren by him and Aseneth. Remember, Jacob has twelve sons of his own, a cosmic number signifying divine perfection.

That is why it is unexpected that Jacob suddenly turns to Joseph and says, “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” (Gen 48:5). Adoptions within a family are well attested in the ancient Orient; a text from Ugarit records a grandfather adopting his grandson as his heir. Why would Jacob want to do this, however?

It has to do with the “inheritance” mentioned in vs. 6. “The children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.” In other words, Joseph actually has more than two sons, but those other sons will be assimilated and assumed under the name of his two oldest.



Note how this map, taken from the public domain, states that Ephraim and Manasseh will become the two most powerful tribes, along with Judah.

We will find out later in the Bible what is going on. You see, Joseph—Jacob’s favorite son—will have a **double portion** of the inheritance. And what is that inheritance? **Land**. “Go [Abram] to the land that I will show you” (**Gen 12:1**). Canaan—**The Promised Land**. The land that Jacob himself had to leave. What is foremost in Jacob’s mind here is returning to the land. So what we discover later is that there will be no “Tribe of Joseph” among the twelve tribes of Israel. Rather, there will be the tribes of Ephraim and

Manasseh, Joseph's two sons, hence a double portion. Of course, that still makes 13, but one of the other twelve will not have any inheritance among the tribes. **Levi** will be called out especially as a tribe of priests and their inheritance will be God himself. So twelve sons of Jacob, minus Joseph and Levi, plus Ephraim and Manasseh still make twelve.

Notice something else here in Jacob's words, however. He says, "**Ephraim and Manasseh**," and that is how most of us have come to hear those two. But the reality is, Manasseh should be first, because he is the oldest. We will see more about why this is, later in the chapter.

To return to the land, these boys will need the covenantal blessing that only Jacob can give. Genesis places extreme importance on the Patriarchal blessing when Jacob, himself the younger brother, stole it from Esau and became the inheritor of the covenant instead of his older brother. Once Isaac gave the blessing away, he could not take it back.

To prepare himself, and us, for this blessing, Jacob reminisces some more. "**As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to**

Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)” (Gen 48:7). Jacob is doing two things. He is preparing himself to die and go to meet his beloved wife. It has been a long, long time since Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin. It has to be one of the things he looks forward to now, seeing her again in the life-to-come.

But we also must remember that Rachel is Joseph’s mother and Ephraim and Manasseh’s grandmother. So in mentioning her, he is drawing them in closer. “Boy’s, your mother is dead and I will soon be with her. So now, what am I to do with you?” It really is an extremely touching and powerful verse. One that while reminding us of the death of a kingly mother, reminds us of the birth of a King, for Jesus was born in the city in which Rachel died.

It tells us that Israel (that is Jacob) saw Joseph’s sons and asked, “Who are these?” (8). As you will soon see, Israel either knows exactly who they are, or somehow finds out. “They are my sons, whom God has given me here” (9), he replies as if to say, “Don’t you remember your own grandsons, father?” Jacob said, “Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them” (9). So here comes the blessing. What will he tell them?

The story is going to tease us here a little, even as it

reminds us of a time long ago in Jacob’s own life. I’m talking about the blessing Isaac gave Jacob.

48:10	Patriarchal blindness	cf. 27:1
48:14–16	Blessing pronounced on younger son	27:27–28
48:17–18	Protest	27:34–36
48:19–20	Reaffirmation of preference	27:37–40
49:2–28	Second blessing pronounced	28:2–6 ³

“Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see” (10). This is the same thing we saw with Isaac when he was about to bless Esau. “So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them” (10). Unlike Isaac, Jacob has both boys at the blessing event at the same time. Israel muses over the past once more. “I never expected to see your face [Joseph]; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also” (11). Jacob can’t believe how gracious God has been to him after all the trouble he was for so many years.

Unlike so many, Jacob understands both depravity and grace. I came across a public school book someone posted explaining different groups of the Reformation. It said that Calvinism believed in predestination and thought that people’s destinies were revealed by their behavior; those

³ Wenham, 460.

who behaved well were saved; those who sinned were not. This absurd and gross misunderstanding of Calvinism would have made Jacob cringe, since he knew that God saved him **in spite of his behavior**. It is grace that saves us when we are wicked and when we are God's enemies, not because we are good people who do great things to make him happy. Jacob gets it. Most people don't want to.

Calvinism	Anglicanism
founded by John Calvin in Switzerland in 1541	founded by VIII in 1534
believed in predestination, the idea that God already knows who will be saved in the afterlife and who will be condemned; thought that people's destinies were revealed by their behavior: those who behaved well were saved; those who sinned were not	believed by away origin believed in by faith: to people need in God, re and receive

At any rate, Joseph takes his sons who are bowing down near the knees of their grandfather, and he himself **bowed down with this face to the ground (Gen 48:12)**.⁴

⁴ "From his knees" does not imply that the boys were sitting on the grandfather's knees. More probably, they had stood by his knees or leaned over them, perhaps another gesture

Then he prepared the sons to receive their grandfather's blessing, whatever it might be. He took Ephraim in his right hand making it Jacob's left hand, and put Manasseh in his left, making it Israel's right hand and brought them near (13). The Right hand is the position of power and the one that was preparing to receive the greater blessing. Manasseh is oldest, so the custom everywhere seemingly but in Genesis is for Manasseh to get the blessing.

But Jacob did a double cross, literally. He stretched out his own right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim the younger and put his left hand on Manasseh's head even though he was the oldest (14). Jacob's arms were literally crossed. Is the old man going senile in his advanced age? Or could it be, as Augustine says, that his hands were "mystically crossed," prefiguring something else?⁵

God the Angel

He begins to pronounce the blessing. The blessing is intended for Joseph (15), even though his hands are on the sons. What he says is remarkable and most people completely miss its profound value for interpreting not only Genesis, but all of Scripture. He says, "The God

betokening his legitimation of them as the equals of his sons." Wenham, 464.

⁵ Augustine, *Confessions* 10.34.52.

before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys...” (16). We will stop here for the moment.

Did you catch it? It is essentially a poetic utterance that repeats the same thought three times. The three lines begin, “The God,” “The God,” and “The angel.” Each line tells you something more than the first.

The first line tells us that Jacob is thinking about the God of Abraham and Isaac. They walked “before” him, as the ESV puts it. The word “before” is *panim* or *paneh*. It is the same word as a “face” in Hebrew. To be before someone like this is literally to be in front of their face.⁶ Thus, other translations will say, “The God in whose presence...” (Gen 48:15 CJB) or “The God in whose sight...” (Gen 48:15 LXA). This point might not seem like a big deal, yet. Of course they are walking before God’s presence. He is omnipresent.

The second line explains that this God was a “shepherd” to Jacob all the days of his long life. David says

⁶ A word study shows that this is quite common in the LXX, but quite rare in the NT. When looking at it, most of its usages seem to be cultic or religion in orientation, be they Levites being before God, or a king standing before one of God’s enemies, or Pharisees standing before Jesus.

the same thing, “The LORD is my Shepherd” (Ps 23:1). Curiously, this title becomes Messianic in Isaiah (40:11) and other places, and thus it is no surprise that it becomes a title that Jesus takes upon himself in John’s Gospel. “I am the Good Shepherd” (John 10:14; cf. Heb 13:20; 1 Pet 2:25). So the people are sheep, and God is the Great Shepherd. They hear his voice when he calls them. But where might Isaiah have discovered this “shepherd” title as being Messianic? Is he just making it up? Is it brand new revelation?

The third line is the killer as it regards the Shepherd, the Nearness of God, and most importantly, God himself. Suddenly, Elohim-God becomes Malak-Angel. “The Angel who has redeemed my from all evil.” Jacob is remembering several events in his past where he spoke with the Angel and even physically wrestled with him. But powerfully, an Angel is here called Jacob’s God. This is as explicit as it gets in terms of identifying the person Geerhardus Vos calls “The most important and characteristic form of revelation in the patriarchal period.”⁷ Jacob is telling us that the Angel of the LORD whom we have seen so many times from the Garden of Eden to Noah and the Flood to Abraham,

⁷ Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1948), 72.

Hagar, Sarah, Isaac, and Jacob—this Angel of the LORD is the LORD. He is God.

Jacob may also have in mind a kind of plurality in the Godhead here, as it is certainly not impossible to see God the Father and God the Son in the way he puts this.⁸ But as far as it involves interpreting the Bible, it is vital to recognize that Jacob is calling the Angel the God of Abraham and Isaac. In fact, he is the God who always speaks to people or prophets throughout the OT. If you miss this, you will end up perverting in your head the way God comes to people throughout the OT, from Genesis – Malachi, and this has effects on your doctrine of God, your doctrine of Christ, your ability or inability to see Jesus' fulfilling the OT, and much more.

Commenting on this very verse Calvin writes, “He was always the bond of connection between God and man ... there was always so wide a distance between God and men, that, without a mediator, there could be no communication ... and because God formally manifested himself in no other

⁸ This seems to be the way Luther takes it. “He [Jacob] joins the three Persons in the one work of blessing—God the Father, God the Shepherd, and the Angel. Accordingly, these three are one God and one Blessor. The Angel does the same work that the Shepherd and the God of his fathers does.” (See reference below).

way than through him, he is properly called the Angel.⁹ Calvin got it at the most important point you can. There is only one mediator between God and man, and that is Jesus. The Testament—Old or New—doesn't matter. The form (Angel or human) doesn't matter. But if we have no Jesus, then we have no mediator. God does not just come to people in his bare essence. Ever. What would that even mean, since God is incomprehensible and ineffable in his essence apart from Christ?

Luther writes, “This Angel is that Lord or Son of God whom Jacob saw and who was to be sent by God into the world to announce to us deliverance from death, the forgiveness of sins, and the kingdom of heaven ... Therefore one must note carefully that Jacob is speaking about Christ, the Son, who alone is the Angel or Ambassador, born a man in time from the Virgin Mary—not the Father, not the Holy Spirit. For he makes a clear distinction among the three Persons. Yet he adds: “May He bless these lads.”¹⁰ Jacob is asking *for Christ* to put a blessing

⁹ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 429.

¹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 8: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 8 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 164.

on his grandsons.

Finally, **Athanasius** says, “None of created and natural Angels did [Jacob] join to God their Creator, nor rejecting God that fed him, did he from any Angel ask the blessing on his grandsons; but in saying, ‘Who delivered me from all evil,’ he showed that it was no created Angel, but the Word of God, whom he joined to the Father in his prayer, through whom, whomsoever He will, God does deliver. For knowing that He is also called the Father’s ‘Angel of great Counsel,’ (Isa 9:6 LXX) he said that none other than He was the Giver of blessing, and Deliverer from evil.”¹¹ And so the great defender of Trinitarianism in the early church realizes that the Word of God is the Angel of God, just as we have seen throughout Genesis.¹²

¹¹ Athanasius of Alexandria, “Four Discourses against the Arians” 3.12, in *St. Athanasius: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. John Henry Newman and Archibald T. Robertson, vol. 4, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Second Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1892), 400.

¹² **Going Deeper:** Incredibly, in the early church, Athanasius stands alone in his comments on Christ. Very few even mention this text. Fewer still see the devastating argument that Jacob is making that this Angel IS God. The *Ancient Christian Commentary Series* has nothing. This bewildering blindness moves right on into modern commentators who, though taking the text very exegetically, nevertheless do not make the associations we have seen here. For example, Wenham makes the fascinating observation, “‘May the God, ... may the God ... may the angel.’ This blessing foreshadows the later priestly blessing in its tripartite structure, ‘May the Lord, ... may the Lord, ... may the Lord,’ and, like the priestly blessing, Jacob’s has also been used in Jewish liturgy.”¹² Yet, he fails to connect the dots in any kind of explicit way. Same goes for **Walton** (“The grammatical parallel indicates that the angel need not be a title for

In the Bible, Hosea also gets into the act. He tells us, “In the womb he took his brother by the heel, and in his manhood he strove with God. He strove with the angel and prevailed; he wept and sought his favor. He met God at Bethel, and there God spoke with us” (Hos 12:3-4). Yes, Scripture from start to finish is begging you to see what these great men of the faith, some inspired by the Holy Spirit himself, saw. If you will, I promise that it will revolutionize the way you read your Bible. Christ is the Living Word of Scripture.

Before moving on, let’s also note that the Angel is called **the Redeemer** (*go’el*, as in a kinsman redeemer). **Luther** again says “**this Angel is our or Liberator. He**

deity ... In other words, Jacob is blessing Ephraim and Manasseh by putting them under the care of God, who shepherds, under his angel, who delivers.” *NIVAC*, 712.), **Hamilton** (NICOT, 637-38 [no mention of Christ]), **Matthews** (“What precisely Jacob refers to or whether he is speaking only generally cannot be confidently determined” *NAC*, 879), **Sarna** (“Admittedly, ‘Angel’ as an epithet for God is extraordinary, but since angels are often simply extensions of the divine personality, the distinction between God and angel in the biblical texts is frequently blurred [cf. Gen. 31:3, 11, 13; Exod. 3:2, 4]. Nevertheless, this verse may reflect some tradition associated with Bethel, not preserved in Genesis, concerning an angelic guardian of Jacob.” *JPSSTC*, 328), and **Currid** (“His statement here highlights the work of redemption of God through the Angel of Yahweh: certainly this is a foreshadowing of the work of the Messiah, Jesus Christ!” *Genesis* vol. 2, 367 [it is, at best, only a foreshadowing of Christ]). Why a Christian would be so hesitant to see Christ here is beyond me.

sets us free with perfect justice and liberates us from the power of the devil, who is subject to the Law because he killed the Son of God. And now the Law, death, and Satan are compelled to be silent and to stretch forth their conquered hands to the victorious and triumphant Christ.”¹³ How incredible it is that this passage not only foreshadows the work of our Savior in human flesh, but actually *is the work* of our Savior on Jacob’s behalf in Angelic flesh.¹⁴ The OT really does prove God’s power and existence, simply in how it shows us so much of Jesus Christ.

Blessing the Younger

With these thoughts in our head, let’s now consider **the blessing** itself. “**Bless the boys**” (**Gen 48:16**). As **Luther** says, Jacob is asking Christ to bless them at this moment. But how? “**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**” (**16**). Jacob is essentially asking Christ to continue the blessing he

¹³ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works, Vol. 8: Lectures on Genesis: Chapters 45-50*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 8 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 163–164.

¹⁴ There are some powerful implications of this with the coming Exodus and Jude 5’s insistence that Christ is the one who saved a people out of Egypt. See Douglas Van Dorn, *From the Shadows to the Savior* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation, 2015), Part VI: Christ the Angel of the LORD.

promised to his own grandfather, not through his grandchildren. How unexpected that the blessing would start not with his own sons, but with his grandsons. And not with any old grandsons, but with the half-Egyptian mutts! For all intents and purposes, these are Gentiles, born and raised in Egypt, sons of an Egyptian mother whose father was a pagan priest! Truly, through Abraham all the nations of the earth will be blessed. What we know of these two tribes is that along with Judah, they would be the most populated and influential of all the tribes of Israel. Christ heard Jacob's prayer.

But Joseph was not so happy. “When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, ‘Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head’” (Gen 48:17-18). Joseph was gone from Israel for a long, long time. Even these past 17 years he has continued living as an Egyptian rather than a Hebrew. He has forgotten the ways of God in the matter of election.

Verse 19 makes me laugh. “But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know.’” Israel is not senile after all.

He knows exactly what he is doing. Even though he is blind, he knows which boy is which. In this, he shows more faith than his own father who wanted to give the blessing to Esau because he favored him. But Jacob has learned and has been changed into Israel. Isaac's God is now his God and he knows the way God chooses to do things. After all, he is the younger himself.

“He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations” (19). As we see at least in the book of Numbers, Manasseh is outnumbered by Ephraim.¹⁵ But the point has to be made to Joseph here. It is not Ishmael, but Isaac the younger. It is not Esau, but Jacob the younger. It is not Zerah, but Perez the younger who would be the father of Christ. Once more, in order that God's purposes in election might stand, the younger will be greater than the older.

This is the way of God in election and Calvin rightly says, “Truly our dignity is hidden in the counsel of God alone, until, by his [calling], he makes it manifest what he wills to do with us. Meanwhile, sinful [striving] is

¹⁵ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 641, n. 18.

forbidden, when he commands Manasseh to be contented with his lot. They are therefore altogether insane, who hew out dry and perforated cisterns, in seeking causes of divine adoption; whereas, everywhere, the Scripture defines in one word, that they are called to salvation whom God has chosen, (Rom. 8:29,) and that the primary source of election is his free good pleasure.”¹⁶

Though it is a hard doctrine for many to swallow, it should be a great comfort to those who are lesser, poorer, dumber, weaker, smaller, shorter, or otherwise looked down upon in this world. For God comes to shame the wise and exalt the meek. Election is the great leveling field that says no one gets in by virtue of their own brawn or brains or beauty or birthright. But only by virtue of becoming last will anyone end up being first. This is the way of the Kingdom of Christ. Therefore, Jacob has humbled his son. “So he blessed them that day, saying, ‘By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, ‘God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh. ’ Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh” (Gen 48:20).

Take Me Home

¹⁶ John Calvin and John King, *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, vol. 2 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 432.

Suddenly, the blessing ends. Jacob becomes very somber and turns to Joseph. “Behold, I am about to die.” This is what I was talking about at the beginning of the sermon. Death is the dark cloud that hovers over Jacob and hovers over you. It is unavoidable. And it must cause you to take stock of your life. Where will you go? What are you trusting? Do you know Christ? These are the most important questions you can ever ask yourself.

My uncle, whom I mentioned earlier, was not a believer for a long time. We prayed for him and prayed for him. But late in his life, God has gotten a hold of him. He now knows the Savior. Do not leave this hour without having found the one who is now seeking you through his Word.

“... but God...” (21). You see? There is Jacob’s hope. In God again. Not just “in God,” like Americans say it on their coins, whatever that should mean. But God through Jesus Christ. But in God and his faithfulness and covenant keeping, displayed in the past, confirmed by the Angel, certain in the future. “God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers” (21).

If Jacob thought Joseph would not die before returning to Canaan, he would have been wrong. Joseph would die

in Egypt. But he was not wrong about Joseph in the tribes of his sons. God would bring them to the land of their fathers, and this is what has been on the old man's mind since the beginning of our story today. Nor was he wrong in terms of Joseph's body, which is itself Joseph—except without the spirit temporarily. Let's look at the last verse.

He concludes, “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” (Gen 48:22). There is nothing in Genesis that says exactly that Jacob took a mountain from the Amorites in a war. However, a few passages are certainly interesting to look at.

John 4 tells us that Jesus “came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph” (John 4:5). This is right between Mt. Ebal and Mt. Gerizim 20 or so miles north of Jerusalem. It is also the ancient town of Shechem, where that horrible event took place earlier in the book with Levi and Simeon killing all the men of the town.



Now, before that event, we learn that Jacob had bought a piece of land from Shechem's father for 100 pieces of money, and there he pitched his tent (**Gen 33:19**). The NAS translates “one mountain slope” as “one portion,” as if Jacob is giving Joseph a double inheritance. The word is literally “one shoulder” or “one Shechem.” One shoulder above might refer to geography, hence “mountain.” This fits the geography of Shechem well. Thus, it is possible to see Jacob as referring to the taking of the city of Shechem in that violent incident with Levi and Simeon.

Joshua tells us about the fulfillment of this. “As for the

bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph” (Josh 24:32). And that is how our chapters ends. It ends **anticipating that God will fulfill the blessings** given through Jacob. Jacob’s hope is not in vain. Indeed, it was fulfilled in ways none of them could imagine. And that is why, when death is near, one need not fear. For God is powerful to perform all he has sworn. He has proven it in the history of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Joseph. He has proven that Jacob’s faith in Christ was not misplaced. He has proven it in sending Christ in human flesh who calls you now to repent and trust in him.