

The Doctrine Of Israel (Part Twelve): Joseph

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Given 29-Aug-20; Sermon #1560

If you will, please turn in your Bibles to Genesis the 4th chapter to the well known story of Cain and Abel. There is a facet of this story that is not dwelled upon very much. I would say that in the church of God it tends to come out every once in a while. But most of the time when we read the story this little principle, if you will, is not mentioned, but I want to read the first five verses of this chapter.

Genesis 4:1-5 Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, and said, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." Then she bore again, this time his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

We all know what happened here later on, just in the next few verses. Cain ended up killing his brother. But I want you to notice the birth order of these two men. Cain was born first and after that, we do not know how long, some have even said that they might have been twins, because there is no additional "and Adam knew his wife Eve and bore" Abel. So the the idea there is that they were born successively as twins. But I just thought I would mentioned it. Either way, Cain was born first.

Like the law of first mention, this principle that I am going to talk about appears very early in the Book, where something like this is brought out as a facet, a feature of how God works with humanity. What I am looking at here is that you have this Cain and Abel duo as the beginning of a pattern of choice that God often uses when fulfilling His purpose. Now, He shows us this principle with the very first human births—Cain and Abel, as far as we

know. And we see God's preference of choice here of the second born, or of a later born child over the firstborn. Oftentimes the firstborn in Scripture is seemingly passed over and the second born is chosen to do a work for God.

As others have pointed out, and perhaps Adam did too, but Eve especially seems to have thought Cain was the promised Seed. That comes out of what she said here, "I have acquired a man from the Lord." The idea here is that this means, I have gotten *the* man from the Lord, you know, *the* promised Seed from the Lord. And if she thought that he was the savior, the deliverer, then she likely doted on him. But as the story works out, God's choice always proves better than human choice. Cain turned out to be the first murderer, not the first savior of any kind. He was fratricidal and seemed to be self-absorbed, always worried about what was going to happen to him. Always trying to get promises from God that he would be safe.

On the other hand, Hebrews 11:4 describes Abel as righteous and says that his righteous example still speaks to us or for us. To us is probably a better way to say it. After 6,000 years we still look back at the example of Abel and his more righteous offering that God accepted. Now, if we were to go any further in this family of Adam and Eve, we find that Abel's replacement, one called Seth at the end of Genesis 4, he was even later down the birth order line than Abel. So we have God choosing the second born and then we have God choosing one later down the line. Maybe Seth was third born. I do not know, it does not say. It just says in verse 25 that Adam knew his wife again and she bore a son and named him Seth.

Now, this story though begins a long line of divine choices of *not* the firstborn son. And these are sons that God chose to work with, those who were not the firstborn. We could go to the next chronological order to Noah, and his sons were Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and that is often how they are listed in Scripture, but that is not their birth order. I do not know why they put Ham before Japheth in that order, but Shem is usually listed first. And oftentimes in not really studying this, we think that he was probably the firstborn. But Genesis 10:21 says that Japheth was the elder. Shem is thought again, like Abel, to have been second born not first, and it was through him that God chose to further the line to Abraham. That is the line through which God's work descended, through Shem the second born.

In fact Shem's son Arphaxad, whom we see in the list of Shem's descendants (specifically I am looking at the one in in Genesis 11:10), was not the firstborn. If you go back to Genesis 10:22, you find that the sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arphaxad, Lud, and Aram. So evidently, if this list is going to be believed as the proper birth order, Arphaxad was the third born, not the first.

Abraham himself, now we are getting to the end of chapter 11, was not the firstborn either. Although if you look at verse 26 in Genesis 11, it says, "Now Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran." Well, one would think that Abraham then was the firstborn. But no, that is not the case. Terah's firstborn was probably the one that is listed last, Haran. Why? Well, we do not see much of Haran in the Bible. We do see a lot about Abraham and we do see somewhat about Nahor. But we would call Haran basically the forgotten brother.

But notice there that it says that Terah lived 70 years and begot. So it seems like his first child was begotten when Terah was 70 years old. That tells us something important. Because if we go through the story, it just goes down here to verse 32, we find that Terah died in Haran when he was 205 years old. Then we find out that when God called Abraham, he was 75 years old. We will do the math: 205 minus 70 gives you 130. So evidently Abram was born when Terah was 130. His older brother Haran may have been born when Terah was 70, so he would have been 60 years older than Abraham. And who was the son of Haran? Lot. Now we understand why Lot and Abraham were probably of the same age or similar ages, because the nephew may have been born before the next brother. Kind of interesting.

But getting back to my point here is that Abraham may have been the last born. He was certainly not the firstborn and perhaps the second born. But again, he was not the firstborn son that God chose to work with. He was a second born at least. Now his son, Isaac, was not Abraham's firstborn son. He was *Sarah's* firstborn son and only born son, but to Abraham, he was his second born son because Ishmael was older than him. God chose, not Ishmael the firstborn, but he chose the second born, the son of promise through Sarah. Isaac's firstborn son was Esau and his second was Jacob. And despite his deceptive personality, Jacob was chosen by God.

It is this pair, Esau and Jacob, that the apostle Paul used as the example of God's election—that God chooses whomever He will. And in this case, and in probably many cases, He chose them before they were even born. You can find out about God's election in Romans 9:10-13, where Paul quotes God saying in Malachi 1:2-3, "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Later on there in Romans 9:18, Paul explains God will have "mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens."

So we are seeing a very similar pattern with these generations after generations of God choosing not the firstborn, but a later born son. It is a pattern. It seems that God chooses to work with later sons rather than firstborns. He did work with some firstborns along the way but it just seems very interesting that this is what He does throughout the book of Genesis.

Jacob had twelve sons and God chose two for His purposes, Judah and Joseph. Judah was Jacob's fourth son. Joseph was his eleventh son. And who knows how many girls were in between Reuben and Joseph, but he was at least the 11th son of all those sons that he had. In the next generation, Judah married a Canaanite woman named Shua and she had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah. And then there was an incident with Tamar who ended up being the wife of all of his sons, but she did have twin sons, Perez and Zerah.

That is why God chose Judah. He chose that line to be the line through which Messiah would come. Jesus Christ came through Perez, who was considered the second born of Tamar. That is the story where Zerah's hand came out first and the midwife put a scarlet thread around the little boy's arm but he withdrew his arm (or had it withdrawn), and Perez came out first. This is the well known breach between the two lines of Judah from which kings came and that was only healed, we think, when a princess of the Perez line married a prince or a king of the Zerah line just after the time of the fall of Jerusalem. But the point remains that Zerah was the firstborn and Perez was the second born and it was through Perez that Jesus Christ came.

We go a little further in the book, out of Genesis, and we find that Moses was not the firstborn. Aaron was older than he. David was not the firstborn. He had six older brothers. And of course Solomon was not a firstborn either. He had many older brothers, but God chose David to establish the kingdom and he chose Solomon to be king after him.

I know this has been kind of a long explanation, but I wanted you to understand how consistent God seems to be in this particular principle, that He tends to choose, not the firstborn, He chooses ones later on. There is nothing to say that firstborns are bad, not in the least, but for some reason, God tends to choose the ones that are not the firstborn. And, in a way, He does that with us. I mean, what does I Corinthians 1:26 and those verses after it say? That He does not choose the wise, does not choose the wealthy, does not choose the great people. He chooses the weak, the lesser, the foolish. And so we have this principle continuing even in the church.

But you probably noticed that I skipped over somebody in Genesis. So let us go to Genesis 41, if you will. Here is when we come to Joseph and Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Let us read this from verse 41-45 and then 50-52. This is Joseph in Egypt being raised to power by Pharaoh.

Genesis 41:41-45 "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." Then Pharaoh took his signet ring off his hand and put it on Joseph's hand; and he clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain around his neck. And he had him ride in the second chariot which he had; and they cried out before him, "Bow the knee!" So he set him over all the land of Egypt. Pharaoh also said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no man may lift his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." [that is giving him quite a bit of power, total power] And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphnath-Paaneah. And he gave him as a wife Asenath the daughter of Poti-Pherah a priest of On. So Joseph went out over all the land of Egypt.

Genesis 41:50-52 And to Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Poti-Pherah priest of On, bore to him. Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh: "For God has made me forget all my toil and all my father's house." And the name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

So here we have Joseph rising to power. Pharaoh giving him pretty much total control, giving him a wife to marry, and then consequently he had two

sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. This is the order in which they were born. Manasseh first and then Ephraim. And it is important that we understand here the indication of the meaning of their names. Manasseh means "making forgetful" or "made to forget." And Ephraim means "fruitfulness" or "prosperity." We are going to be hearing a lot about that in this sermon. Joseph himself, the name Joseph, means "He will add," meaning God will add or simply, his name means "increase."

Now these are important indicators of major characteristics of these boys' descendants. They had the name of their father, increase or he will add, and they had the name of the tribes: Manasseh, making forgetful or made to forget, and Ephraim, fruitfulness or prosperity, because these became descriptors of the people that came from these boys. Manassites are forward-looking people, they are made to forget the past. They do not look backwards. Their eyes are not on where they have come from but are on where they are going—very forward looking people and tend to forget or ignore the past. Not big on history are Manassites. In the main, they tend to repeat the same mistakes over and over again because they have a mindset that is always looking out the front window and not out the rearview mirror. Ephraimites are industrious, prosperous, successful people, the kind that turns the proverbial lemons into lemonade.

Over all of this is the influence of Joseph as the patriarch of these two tribes providing the characteristic of addition or increase. Everything Joseph seems to have touched just increased exponentially. This was a great thing during that famine that he could bring in so much grain and he became very wealthy and prosperous and powerful.

Altogether the families of Joseph, split out into Ephraim and Manasseh, are a positive, productive, expansive bunch. This is, by the way, a recurring theme about Joseph in prophecy, as you see it wherever in the Bible. There is always talk of abundance, increase, expansion, constantly seeking of what is ahead. They are people on the move, they are onward and upward kind of people, they are progressive in the good sense, they are always looking to make things better, bigger, especially Americans. Americans are really well known for the bigger and better principle.

Let us go to Genesis 48, a few chapters over. We will pick this up again, these two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh. This is in the time where Jacob blessed them. But I want to read the first six verses here because it is the preamble to the passing on of the birthright to Joseph's sons. And it is important that we look at this because there is a few things of note here that we should bring out.

Genesis 48:1-6 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father is sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. [they are listed in their birth order] And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and set up on the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.' And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance."

I do have four points here that we need to just note. They are not they are not extensive. They are not terribly, terribly important, but we at least have to understand them.

The first is that the extent of the birthright as he sets it up here, is limited to being fruitful and multiplying and inheriting the land. He does not go any further than that. There is no promise of spiritual blessings or of any kind of kingship because that scepter promise we find in the next chapter, goes to Judah, not to Joseph. And so those things, with the coming of the Messiah and all that, all those spiritual blessings that would come through Him, they are not part of the birthright that was given to Joseph and his two sons.

The second thing that we need to pick out here is that Jacob, when he first begins to talk to Joseph, immediately calls them Ephraim and Manasseh, not

Manasseh and Ephraim as they are introduced in the first verse of the chapter. He turns it around immediately and says, Ephraim and Manasseh, Ephraim first and then Manasseh.

Third point, despite those two boys being his grandsons, Jacob adopts them as his sons. He pulls them up a generation, if you will, and he makes them superior to his first two sons. He specifically mentions Reuben and Simeon, which are one and two in the birth order of Jacob. But he says, "No, these two, Ephraim and Manasseh, will be one and two." It is almost as if he is replacing them, I guess he is, replacing them on top of the heap. So, Jacob's sons really should go Ephraim, Manasseh, then Reuben, then Simeon, because he pulled them up and made them his adopted sons as his firstborn sons. So, Ephraim and Manasseh slot in above the other sons of Jacob in terms of inheritance. They go straight to the top—head of the class. They are firstborns now. Both of them our firstborns.

The fourth point, if Joseph had any other children, and we have no idea whether he did or not, he may have, there is nothing in the Bible that says he had other children, but Jacob takes care of the possibility that that would occur. Joseph was evidently still a fairly young man and his wife fairly young too. But if they had any other children, they would be considered either Ephraimites or Manassites. They would not begin their own tribe. Like I said, we have no record of any other children by Joseph, but Jacob's charge here that they would be slotted in under Ephraim and Manasseh as either Ephraimites or Manassites takes care of that possibility.

We are going to skip verse 7 here and read from verse 8 all the way to the end of the chapter.

Genesis 48:8-22 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons and said, "Who are these?" Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. And Joseph took

them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near to him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. [this where he crosses his hands to make sure his right hand goes on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh's.]

And he blessed Joseph, and said, "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has fed me all my life long to this day, the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; let my name be named upon them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put 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; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

A momentous occasion here. A momentous legal proceeding that took place here. And it is the giving of the birthright to the firstborn. Of course, we know that Jacob, or Israel I should call him, in this case chose Ephraim and then Manasseh, but he gave them both the firstborn inheritance, gave it to them jointly, although Israel gave more to Ephraim than to Manasseh.

Now, Jacob's question there in verse 8, "Who are these?" may sound a little funny because he should know. Did they not just discuss that he was

bringing his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to him? But it sounds like he did not know who they were at all. But that is not the case. It is easily answered that he actually did know who they were, but there is a good reason for it. The first one, of course, was that he was blind. He could not see very well and so he was just making sure upon whom he was conferring the birthright. Also, it may just be a problem in translation, that we just cannot see it in English that he was saying, "Okay, which is which?" He may have been doing that because he could not see. And of course we have to remember that Jacob had not forgotten how *he* had gotten the birthright by deception and so he was asking the question to make sure that he would not be deceived as he had deceived Isaac.

The other thing that it may be, and I tend to lean towards this explanation, is that it may have been part of the formalities of the legal procedure, that he had to ask, "Who is coming before me to receive the inheritance?" So he was actually probably just going through the formalities of saying to Joseph, "Okay, who are these? Introduce these two to me so that we keep everything aboveboard and do it the way it is supposed to be done." If you would go back at some point to Genesis 27:18 you will find that Isaac asked the same thing of Jacob. "Who are you?" And of course he lied, and said, "I'm Esau." But then later on in the chapter I believe he actually asked Esau, "Who are you?" And he said, "Esau" and he was telling the truth but he had already given the blessing over to Jacob.

I do want you to note here throughout this passage, that is verse 8-22, Jacob is called Israel. He is not once called Jacob. In every case, he is called Israel, from the time the legal procedure started when he asked him, "Who are these?" he is always called Israel. And this is very important because Israel was his *godly* name, his divinely-given name. As a matter of fact, you could call it his legal name. He was Israel, Jacob was his birth name, and it was not worthy to be his legal name, if you will. Jacob means the supplanter. That is not the kind of name you want for something that is going to go into all eternity in terms of his character. No, he was called Israel, which is "prevailing with God." So this name is used and it is very important that it is used because it indicates God's sanction of passing of the birthright to Ephraim and Manasseh.

God named Jacob what he was. He named him Israel, and then in turn, Israel is passing on his name to Ephraim and Manasseh, which is what we find there in verse 16, "Let my name be named upon them." So they received the name Israel as well, it was part of their inheritance to be named Israel. So if you want to look at it this way, maybe it will be an easier way to think of it, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are more Israel than the other tribes. The other tribes were not given the name Israel, only Joseph's sons were given the name Israel. Like I said a few minutes ago, they possessed that name as part of the birthright, part of the inheritance. *They* are Israel, it is their national name. We should not be called the United States of America or the United Kingdom. We should be called Israel because that is the name of the Joseph tribes.

This is vital in understanding prophecy because if the Bible foretells of happenings to Israel, it most particularly points to the tribes of Joseph. *They are Israel*, if you will, in a greater sense than the other tribes. Now, all Israel of course would include the other tribes, but these prophecies first indicate the Joseph tribes and then the other tribes only in their relationship to Joseph. This is how significant this particular passing of the birthright and the name of Israel on to these two tribes is. It is very important for us to understand this, that they were, if you will, the banner bearers of Israel. They were the ones that went first, they were the ones that received the blessings of Abraham, and the other tribes received them only in relation to their relationship with Joseph.

So, this was monumental. It was very significant and it is going to become even more and more important, vital, as we come towards the return of Jesus Christ.

Now, notice that Jacob blesses them jointly and individually. It was not just a blanket thing on both of them. It starts out that way, verse 15, "And he blessed Joseph," it says. So he blessed Joseph, the patriarch, and he also blessed the tribes of Joseph which are Ephraim and Manasseh. And then in verse 16, he says, "Bless the lads." So they were blessed together. Then in verses 19 and 20, Jacob gives them individual blessings, more to Ephraim than to Manasseh, but they share in the totality of the birthright though Ephraim receives the greater portion. Manasseh did not get caught behind

the door when they were passing out the gifts. They both receive the fullness of it. But Ephraim gets the greater portion, the greater honor, if you will, as the firstborn, the *new* firstborn, let me put it that way.

We know that Ephraim becomes a multitude of nations, as it says there in verse 19. The essence of what Israel is saying here is that Ephraim, you are going to become an empire. That is what a multitude of nations are when they are ruled by one people, they become an empire. Ephraim is the empire tribe of Israel. Manasseh becomes one great nation. And as we believe and teach, Ephraim is Britain with its empire and commonwealth, and Manasseh is the United States, one great nation who has held sway for many decades now, at least since World War One and perhaps before then. Both were or are great in their time. Ephraim first, then Manasseh.

Now, what did the birthright and its attendant blessing entail? Well, they are all about national things. National promises. Top of the list is burgeoning population, abundance, productivity, and also authority or might or hegemony among the nations. These are physical promises that are handed down through these two tribes and we will see this. Let us go back to Genesis 27. I just mentioned it in terms of Isaac and Jacob and Esau. But I want you to see here and verses 27 through 29 what Isaac bestowed on Jacob.

Genesis 27:27-29 And he came near and kissed him [meaning this is Isaac]; and he smelled the smell of his clothing, and blessed him and said: "Surely the smell of my son is like the smell of a field which the Lord has blessed. Therefore may God give you of the dew of heaven, of the fatness of the earth, and plenty of grain and wine. Let people serve you, and nations bow down to you. Be master over your brethren, and let your mother's sons bow down to you. Cursed be everyone who curses you, and blessed be those who bless you!"

This was the blessing that he had been given and then he passes that down in these terms to Ephraim and Manasseh. So what Ephraim and Manasseh received are God's physical blessings that He had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It is at this point that the blessing and the birthright split.

These are the birthright promises that were given to Joseph. And the blessing promises with the rulership, the scepter, and the coming of the promised Seed of Jesus Christ, those go down through Judah.

So, what was passed on then was the blessings or the promise of great riches: of well-watered fertile land, sea power, global, geographic, and oceanic choke points, military prowess, and that sort of thing. In other words, these are the blessings of Abraham that we enjoy across the English-speaking world of Ephraim and Manasseh. God put His people in places where there was a good climate, a lot of productive land, lots of springs and rivers and relatively mild climates, and He also gave them choke points around the world, and we found over the past several 100 years, that it is naval power that really makes a nation militarily strong, and Britain certainly showed that in all the places that they have held, like Gibraltar and Hong Kong and other places where they have controlled the shipping and the military movement of other peoples and of course that is in there too. That they would have power over other nations, that other nations would bow to them and give in to them.

In a nutshell, if you want, what was given are divinely bestowed advantages. God's people Israel, particularly Ephraim and Manasseh, were given blessings from God that would give them an incredible advantage over other nations, especially when they came to fruition as we seem to think about the year 1800. That is when things really got going with the British Empire and America began to grow and become more powerful.

As you probably figured out, this is my 12th sermon on "The Doctrine of Israel" and this one of course centers on the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh. We will be getting into the prophetic utterances of Jacob in the next chapter, Genesis 49, and briefly into Deuteronomy 33 which is Moses' blessing on Israel. And the prophecy and the blessing in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are the longest in both chapters. He spends very little time on Reuben and Simeon and Judah and all the other tribes, well, Judah gets a good amount in Genesis 49, not so much in Deuteronomy 33. But the other tribes do not get very much more than a verse or maybe two.

But when you get to Joseph, you get four, five, six verses because they are the ones to whom the blessings came predominantly. Both prophecies say much the same thing. We will be reiterating the same things throughout this.

But we need to go through them separately because each contains details that are distinctive and significant in terms of prophecy. So we just need to make sure that we pull these out and look at them.

Let us start in Genesis 49. We will read the first two verses here, so that we just recap what Jacob says that he is going to be talking about.

Genesis 49:1-2 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father."

Jacob says his speech is about their tribes in the last days, which we know is basically that limited time, limited period, before Christ returns—what we call the end time and the final years before the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Because we believe that Christ will return soon, we can say that what Jacob said is prophecies of modern day Israel. It is a little tough to see at times because we do not think in the way Jacob was thinking, we do not know all the different symbols and significance of various things, but that is essentially what he is saying here. This is what the board is going to look like right before Jesus Christ comes back.

Let us read verses 22 through 26. This is the section on Joseph and it is interesting that he did not say, "This is my prophecy for Ephraim and this is my prophecy for Manasseh." He does not do that. He takes them together as the Joseph tribes.

Genesis 49:22-26 "Joseph is a fruitful bow, a fruitful bow by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him, and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the

blessings of my ancestors, up to the uttermost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers."

Before we go any further, I want to read to you another translation of this from a modern critical commentary, *The Anchor Yale Bible Commentary*. I want you to note the differences here and I am not saying that this is a good translation at all. I am just trying to show you what modern critical scholars have done with this passage and it changes things quite a bit.

Joseph is a wild colt, a wild colt by a spring, wild asses on a hillside. Archers in their hostility harried and attacked him. Yet each one's bow stayed rigid, and their arms were unsteady by dint of the champion of Jacob, the shepherd, rock of Israel, the God of your father who aids you, Shaddai who grants you his blessings. Blessings of heaven above, of the deep that couches below, blessings of breast and womb, blessings of grain stock and blossom, blessings of mountains eternal, the delights of hills everlasting. May they rest upon the head of Joseph, the crown of one set apart from his brothers.

That is significantly different than what we have in the New King James version. So there is quite a bit of controversy about this passage. I mean, it just starts out, Is Joseph a fruitful vine or is he a wild colt? It just starts with the very first words of the passage and goes from there, and I can say after studying this a bit, that there are good arguments on either side. The wild colt imagery mostly derives from the fact that Jacob describes none of the other tribes in terms of plants, they are all described in terms of animals or of men. Judah is a lion's whelp. Simeon and Levi are brothers. Dan is a serpent by the way. None of them are described as any kind of tree or plant or what have you. All accept Joseph.

And so the idea is that there must be a problem in translation here and that Jacob actually used an animal to describe Joseph, but that is kind of not here or there. God can inspire him to describe Joseph in any way He wants. I mean in Hosea 9:13, if you want to look at that later, it describes Ephraim as planted in a pleasant place, which seems to be referring back to what is said here by Jacob. And Scripture often describes abundance and prosperity in

terms of verdant trees, vines, crops, fruitful fields, and that sort of thing. I mean, it is only natural that we would think of prosperity and fertility in terms of growing crops or trees producing a lot of fruit. That is what we see all the time. I guess you could do it in terms of horses having colts and sheep having little lambs and what have you. But the pleasant plant, the verdant field, the fruitful field, that sort of thing, seems to me a stronger image, especially in terms of here he is talking about a fruitful bow by a well that goes over a wall. That tells you something a whole lot more than a wild colt by a spring and wild asses on a hillside. It makes a whole lot more sense.

So, if you want my vote, I say it is "Joseph is a fruitful bow." I like that one a whole lot better.

Just for kicks, I am going to tell you that the modern interpretation of Joseph being a a wild colt, relies on a cognate phrase in Arabic which changes "his branches" to "wild asses." There actually is a modern Arabic phrase very much like the one that is in Hebrew behind Genesis 49:22 that actually means wild asses. So, it would read more like, Joseph is a wild ass, but that does not make a whole lot of sense because that is what God called Ishmael, and it was not something that should be taken as a good thing.

I am not a Hebrew scholar, so I do not have much to say about the merits of that cognitive phrase in Arabic so I will fall back on what we have been given through the Masoretic text, which is a lot closer to what we have here in the New King James version than what the modern critical scholars would translate as wild colt. I mean, Ephraim means fruitful, does it not? And Joseph means adding. So the fruitful bow imagery seems a whole lot more apropos to those sorts of things. It fits the overall theme, a whole lot better. So, I am going to stick with the New King James version of this translation of this passage.

The passage brings out four distinctive themes that we have to remember about Joseph and I am just going to give you these very quickly—one word each. The four themes are fruitfulness, strength, blessings, and separateness. Those are the four main ideas that pop out of this passage about Joseph.

That Joseph is a fruitful bow implies fertility. So he is saying that Joseph will have a prolific population. He said, as we just saw there in Genesis 48, they

are not only going to be a great nation, but they are going to be a company of nations or a multitude of nations, and that means they are going to have a gigantic population to work with. Ephraimites and Manassites are a fertile group of people. And this growing, burgeoning population lives in fertile, well-watered lands that encourage large families. What was America known for up until a couple generations ago? Big, huge farming families out in the Midwest or what have you. People regularly having 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, a dozen children to work the farm. And we had the fertility in the ground to support all those people because God had given us a very fertile, well-watered land.

These large families I am talking about leads to the next factor, which is that these people, these Ephraimites and Manassites, need room to live and to farm, to do what they do. So they are constantly pushing the boundaries of their lands. That is the image of "his branches run over the wall." They are not confined to one place, they are not confined, let us say in this particular image, to a garden that has borders, walls, that are supposed to keep everything in. But no, Ephraim and Manasseh tend to not care about boundaries and borders in this way. They are always seeking for new lands because they need more room. So they are an expansive, migrating, pioneering, colonizing people. That is what this particular image shows us—whole branches of the family take off for new lands, empty lands, where they can settle down, start clearing forests, and putting up a farm. That is what Ephraim and Manasseh tends to do, take a ship to some foreign land and open it up for colonization.

Let us go into the next verse about the archers in verse 23. The archers are their enemies, Joseph's enemies, and evidently that it is included in this prophecy is very important for us to understand: that Joseph has a lot of enemies. Evidently a lot of people hate and attack Joseph and I think we have seen this on the world scene a lot. This is only human nature, this is other nations feeling envious of the blessings that God has given. Even in our own society, people like to tear down the rich because they want to have what the rich have and so they despise and attack them, attack those that are prosperous. And then when you have the fact that God is the one who has so abundantly prospered them and blessed them, it ratchets all this up even further, because then you get the influence of Satan on these enemies of Israel and they tend to attack more vehemently.

So this particular verse foretells the envy and the heavy opposition to Joseph and their expansion and their wealth. How many people hate the idea of empire because of what the British did all over the world? I mean, we are feeling it now with this BLM movement. It is actually partially an anti-colonial movement. The British were very involved up to a certain point in slave trade and they, in a sense, raped a lot of places (that is how it is looked upon today), for their resources. And so the United States of America is paying for their part in all of this because, being brother to Ephraim, we were all part of the same prospering, expansive family, one of the colonies that did exactly what the British did in other parts of the world. So we are seeing in what we are going through today is just a microcosm of the larger picture that God is showing through verse 23 here.

Let us go on to verse 24. This is about the bow remaining in strength. "The arms of his hands were made strong" by God. I do not know if you noticed when I read the section from the modern critical commentary, they switched it around to mean that the bow was the enemy's bow, not Joseph's bow, and the arms were the enemy's arms and they made them all negative. I will read that very quickly just to remind you. It said, verse 23,

Archers in their hostility harried and attacked him. Yet each one's bow stayed rigid [meaning it was not bent] and their arms were unsteady [meaning they could not aim properly] by dint of the champion of Jacob, the shepherd, the rock of Israel.

That is how modern critical scholars look at this. We have here in in the New King James, the translator is looking at it from the other direction, that it is Joseph's bow and Joseph's arms that remain strong. Actually, the Hebrew can be read either way, because the pronouns, if you will, are not clear about who it is referring to. So it could be either. I like the more positive one, that Joseph's bow remained in strength and the arms of his hands were made strong because of what God had added to him. That, again, is Joseph's name, addition, increase. And so that fits the themes in their names a whole lot better.

So this shows that the true strength of Ephraim and Manasseh are in God or is in God. He is their champion, He is the one that gives them miraculous victories. We have the Spanish Armada coming to tear Ephraim down before

it could get strong. And what happens? The weather turns against them and Ephraim wins. That was 1588, I think it was, the Spanish Armada, something like that. There have been many other battles, things that were on a thread and there is some sort of miraculous help that comes out of nowhere and Israel wins. Israel can go on to more victories. And this is saying that those victories were given to them by God Almighty. He is the one blessing them with military strength, military might, and the victories that they could not have won on their own. You could say, this coming right after verse 23, that without God helping them, they would have long ago been dragged down by their many enemies. It is only by the grace of God that you have a Great Britain or the United States of America.

It is interesting that this phrase here, "by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob," appears in several other places in Scripture and the idea that is behind it is that God stands as Joseph's champion. He is the one that fights for them. He is their proxy, if you will, that fights for them rather than Joseph having to fight on his own. Verse 25 then reiterates the same point, that the help and the blessings that have come upon Joseph have come from the God of Jacob. And literally this says, by the El of your father and El Shaddai or God Almighty. They have the greatest, the strongest, the most wonderful Champion on their side. And they cannot help but win.

And we have said that God is faithful. He was going to bring the promises of Abraham upon the descendants of these tribes. It is part of the plan. And so God Himself stood in the gap, stood in the breach, if you will, and made sure that these tribes got to where they were supposed to get to, made sure that they were strong enough at the time, had the land that they needed to be prosperous, to do the things that God wants them to do.

Remember, these are prophecies for the end time. And to get those two boys, Ephraim and Manasseh and then all their descendants to this point at the same time, God had to be holding their hands the whole way. God has always walked with Ephraim and Manasseh. Not that they ever acknowledged Him. But He was doing it for His own sake. He was doing it because He made a prophecy back here in Genesis 49 that He was going to bring to pass—because He has a plan. He has His purpose. These two tribes have to do something and they have to be there at the end to do it. Well, we are getting to that point here.

So, what we have here in verse 25 is the blessings of heaven, which is the blessings of weather and good climate, rain, dew when it is needed, sun when it is needed, a mild climate, not harsh. Blessings of the deep. These are things like an abundant water supply, inexhaustible wells and springs. You cannot do much without water. And He is saying, "I will give Ephraim and Manasseh plenty of it." The blessings of the breasts and of the womb. There is that fertility again, and also health, that they would have healthy kids and healthy mothers.

Verse 26 should probably read this way. "The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of the timeless heights, the bounties of the everlasting hills." Probably a little bit better translation than is in the New King James because it balances pretty well with the parallelism between heights and hills. Deuteronomy 33:15 says something similar, which is thought to harken back to this verse. What is being said here are these are the greatest blessings that God could give a people ever. They are superlative blessings and they have been placed on Joseph's head as a blessing or a benediction. You can even call it an ordination. They have been given these great blessings for a purpose.

Now, we get to separate here, the theme of separateness in verse 26. It says here that "they shall be [these blessings] on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers." The word "separate" here is nazeer, as in Nazarite, that is, one consecrated or one separated or set apart for special duties. Joseph was not a Nazarite. That is not what it means. But the idea is very similar that, God did separate him and his two sons. First, He separated him from his brothers to do his special work in Egypt and that is a sign, that is a symbol as a type of the separation that the peoples of Ephraim and Manasseh will do in the end time. Like their forefather, they will have to do their part in saving the world, if you will. I do not know how that is all going to work out.

But the verse implies that the tribes of Joseph remain under this consecration for God's special use in the end time. That they were blessed for a reason, and He will ask them to reciprocate in the end. So, in response to or in payment for His super-abundant blessings, God will use Ephraim and Manasseh for His divine purposes in the end time. They are not off the hook,

they were not just given all these blessings for free. They were separated from the other tribes of Israel for a reason, for a purpose, and God will have them do whatever it is that they will do in the end time, if you will, as a payment.

Let us go to Deuteronomy 33. This will be very quick because obviously we do not have very much time. But essentially the reason is there is not much difference between Deuteronomy 33:13-17 and what we just saw there in Genesis 49. Now, this is a blessing, as Moses says, and you can see that in the first verse. But it is also very much like what Jacob said. So it is probably also a prophecy for the end time.

Deuteronomy 33:13-16 And of Joseph he said: "Blessed of the Lord is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months [or the moons], with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, in the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let the blessings come 'on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.'"

Up to this point, this is very, very similar to what Jacob said. We could call it a free approximation of what Jacob prophesied back in Genesis 49. He gives him the blessings, on Joseph, in the same way: on his land, on his climate, on his springs and wells and rivers, on his agriculture. He talks about blessings of natural resources: that would be things like mineral wealth, gold, silver, timber, oil, and those sorts of things with which Ephraim and Manasseh have dominated throughout the last couple of centuries. Interestingly though, Moses does not mention population growth or the fertility and health of the people. And I think it is just kind of assumed that, if they have all those other blessings, they are probably going to be healthy and fertile as well.

Verse 17 though is entirely new.

Deuteronomy 33:17 "His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns are like the horns of the wild ox; together with them he shall push the peoples to the ends of the earth; they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, they are the thousands of Manasseh."

This verse focuses on military might and political power and influence over foreign peoples. Ephraim, as the new firstborn, is seen as a strong bull, which is, by the way, a national symbol of Great Britain, of England, their Uncle Sam they call John Bull, so it fits the type here. Some wonder if, where it says here "his horns are like the horns of the wild ox," if the wild ox is not Manasseh, that Ephraim is the firstborn bull here and Manasseh is the wild ox. That would suggest that he is very similar to his brother. Manasseh is very similar to Ephraim, but he is less tamed, he is less cultured. He tends to be more wild. And that kind of fits too. We have been pretty much a free spirit over here on the other side of the pond.

However, the overall idea in verse 17 is not identity, but it is the stubborn, patient, unyielding, overwhelming strength of these peoples that pushes or gores other nations into doing its bidding. We do that all the time. We are constantly pushing other nations to either side with us, you know, put up or shut up and telling them what to do. If you want to, when you have some time, look at I Kings 22:11 and even Daniel 8:4 where you see this idea of horns, strength, pushing other people to make them do the bidding of whoever is behind the horn there. In any case, it is a symbol of worldwide dominance, of hegemony, and large, innumerable, undefeatable armies. Who have been the global dominators over the past several centuries? Britain and then the US. The ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh.

Let us end in Hebrews 11. The New Testament does not talk about this thing, this idea of Ephraim Manasseh very much, but it is mentioned in the Faith Chapter, believe it or not.

Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

What happened in that tent or house or wherever was that Jacob was, on his deathbed, and he passed on the birthright to Ephraim and Manasseh was not an insignificant occasion. It was one of the great acts of faith in God's purpose. A major act in God's plan that He would pass on the inheritance, all those blessings of Abraham upon those two young boys. And as we have seen, Jacob's prophecy stands as a significant revelation of God's plan for Israel and the world. And we are seeing it played out before our eyes.