

# The Tribe of Joseph

Genesis 35:10-12 reads

“And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.

And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;

And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.”

God Has a Plan. God Keeps His Promises.

## **Joseph's Background**

Joseph, or Yosef in the Hebrew meaning “he will add”, was the 11th son of Jacob, the first-born of Rachel his mother. Born to him in his old age, Joseph was Jacob’s favorite. Jacob displayed his favoritism by making Joseph a coat of many colors. Jacob’s differential treatment of Joseph fueled jealousy amongst his brothers. To add fuel to the fire, Joseph at the age of 17 began having these dreams—dreams of his father, mother and brothers bowing down in submission to him. (We are reminded that one day every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.)

Now, it was not enough for Joseph to *have* these dreams, but he *just had* to tell somebody. I can imagine he was excited and wanted to share these remarkable dreams but no doubt he was also beginning to feel himself! As my grandmother used to say, “You’re getting just a little too big for your britches now.” Pride had more than likely crept into Joseph’s heart. Recognizing this in Joseph as well as knowing Joseph’s process, God began to set HIS plan in motion. God orchestrated a series of trials for Joseph, taking him to the pit, to slavery and to prison for his wilderness experiences designed to develop, equip and prepare him for what laid ahead, the palace. But through it all, Joseph still had the blessing and favor of God upon his life. God still had in mind to use Joseph in a mighty way. He still had purpose for Joseph and all he went through. He used Joseph and his divine gifts as an administrator and dream interpreter even while in the wilderness. Every trial—being misunderstood and ostracized by his brothers, being falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife (Potiphar was an officer of Pharaoh), every stage of Joseph’s process was positioning him in fulfillment of his purpose.

To paraphrase the words of Reuben, Joseph’s oldest brother as found in Genesis 37:22, don’t kill Joseph. Just put him in the wilderness so he can be delivered to his father. Just like us when we go through our wilderness experiences, it’s not to kill us but to make us and mold us so we can be delivered to and used by our father in heaven! Later, Joseph would interpret Pharaoh’s dreams of seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine in the land, catapulting him overnight to rule over all Egypt, answering only to Pharaoh himself. As ruler of Egypt, Joseph was able to provide for his family and ensure their survival. As were Joseph’s sentiments, we are reminded in Romans 8:28: And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

## **Ephraim and Manasseh**

Genesis 41 lets us know that before the years of famine came, two sons were born unto Joseph and Asenath (AS ih nath). Joseph called the name of the first-born Manasseh (Muh

Nassuh) meaning “making forgetful or causing to forget” because God had made him forget all his trouble and the family of his father. The hardship brought upon him by his brothers was a thing of the past. The name of the second was called Ephraim (EE-freh-em) meaning “fruitful or fruitfulness and doubly fruitful” because God had made him fruitful in the land of his suffering.

In Genesis 48, we learn Jacob becomes ill thus prompting a visit by Joseph and his two sons. Jacob uses this visit as an opportunity to repeat the promise received by God as well as speak blessings over the lives of Ephraim and Manasseh. Talking to Joseph, Jacob said God Almighty appeared to him, blessed him and spoke these words: Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession. After repeating the promise, Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as his own by declaration giving them the same rights and privileges as his sons by birth.

Now the Word of God says that Israel could not see because of old age. Joseph had positioned Ephraim in front of Israel’s left hand and Manasseh in front of Israel’s right hand. With Manasseh being the first-born, the blessing was to fall on him, as was the custom in that day. However, the Spirit of God led Israel to stretch forth his right hand and place it on Ephraim’s head instead. It was not a mistake because the Word of God says he was “guiding his hands wittingly” which means knowingly. He knew what he was doing. Joseph even attempted to correct his father, but his father knew what he had done. Manasseh would become a people and also be great, but Ephraim would be greater and his seed a multitude of nations.

We have our preconceived notions of whom God ought to bless or use when God has already made up his mind. Nothing you do can change it. What God has for you is for you! Matthew Henry’s commentary states “Grace observes not the order of nature, nor does God prefer those whom we think fittest to be preferred, but as it pleases him.” Grace gives us what we don’t deserve. Just as we receive blessings that we don’t deserve, so did Ephraim.

Later, Jacob prophesies over the lives of Joseph and his brothers. In Genesis 49:22, Jacob compares Joseph to a fruitful bough or young tree; for, God had made him fruitful in the land of his affliction, a testament to the birth of his son Ephraim. His two sons were as branches of a vine, or other spreading plants, running over the wall. This prophecy draws a significant parallel to John 15:1 & 5 in which Jesus declares I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.

The descendants of Ephraim and Manasseh became what we know today as the Tribe of Ephraim and the Tribe of Manasseh both of which are considered the Tribe of Joseph. Ten tribes of the north, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, became known as Israel or Ephraim. Ephraim was the name given to Israel because it was the largest tribe of the northern kingdom. After becoming completely given over to its idolatry and accompanying practices of spiritual adultery and harlotry (symbolically engaging in prostitution by worshipping false gods), Ephraim was taken into captivity in Assyria. However, when God afflicts his people, he does not forget them. “Is Ephraim my dear son? Is he a pleasant child? for since I spake against him, I do earnestly remember him still: therefore my bowels are troubled for him; I will surely have mercy upon him, saith the Lord.” Jeremiah 31:20 The New Living Translation reads “Is not Israel still my son, my darling child?” asks the Lord. “I had to punish him, but I still love him. I long for him and surely will have mercy on him. As

recorded in the book of Isaiah Chapter 61 verse 7, “For Your shame ye shall have double”. The firstborn son received a double share of the inheritance. In Jeremiah 31:9 God states “for I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my first-born.

Perhaps you may recall one of the twelve spies sent to spy out the land of Canaan was Joshua. Joshua, the son of Nun (None), an Ephraimite (EE fruh im ite), was one of the two believing and courageous spies. As a descendant of Joseph, Joshua demonstrated his gift of administration in distributing the inheritances after leading the nation of Israel to conquer and settle the Promised Land. According to Numbers 13:8, Joshua’s original name was Hoshea (hoe SHEE ah) as he had been renamed by Moses. Meaning “The Lord is Salvation or The Lord Saves”, Joshua is also an Old Testament form of Jesus, Yahshua in Hebrew. Just as Israel’s salvation depended only on the Lord, likewise does our salvation come solely from the Lord. To the utmost Jesus saves! He will pick you up and turn you around. Hallelujah, Jesus saves! Just as HE picked Ephraim up and turned them around, he can pick you up or that love one and turn them around.

The Tribe of Manasseh was divided, one half on each side of the Jordan River. During their first 430 years in Egypt, the Tribe of Manasseh increased to 32,200 men of war. By the second census, 39 years later, it numbered 52,700. Eastern Manasseh was able to occupy its land only after it had aided the other tribes in conquering their territories. The Tribe of Manasseh was known for its valor which is great courage and bravery. A notable descendant of the Tribe of Manasseh was Gideon, a judge over Israel. Joash (JOE ash), the father of Gideon, was an Abiezrite (a bih EZ rite). Abiezer (a bih EE zur) was one of the male children of Manasseh according to Joshua 17:2. Gideon eventually answered the call of God on his life and defeated the Midianites with only 300 men and a divine strategy.

### **Conclusion**

The Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New Testament. We are able to draw parallels between Abraham’s promise in the Old Testament and the fulfillment of those promises in the New Testament through Jesus Christ—God’s ultimate plan—Christ, the promised seed (the first-born of many), Heaven, the Promised Land! Ephraim, Manasseh and their descendants were not the only ones adopted into a family, blessed with unmerited favor and promised an everlasting inheritance. As sons of God, we are joint heirs with Jesus Christ having been adopted into the body of Christ, seated with him in heavenly places.

To God Be the Glory!

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