

53. The final chapter of Jacob's life

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When a person faces the end of his life, he has a tendency not to be concerned about what others would think or say about him. Jacob is a case in point. As he enters into the final chapter of his life, this patriarch wants to share his heart with his sons and grandchildren. These two chapters 48 and 49 are very important chapters in the Old Testament because they set a tone of each tribe's future and even the prophecy about Jesus.

A. ISRAEL IN EGYPT

Genesis 47:27-31 So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. 28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. 29 When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." 31 Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

Since Jacob had rejected Reuben who committed adultery with his father's concubine, Joseph was now performing the duties of the firstborn son, including the burial of the father. Jacob knew that his days were numbered, and he wanted to be sure that he would be buried in the Promised Land and not in Egypt. Jacob was one of God's pilgrims, and he wanted to be buried with his family in the land that would one day be home for his descendants. Jacob desired that his funeral would be a clear witness that he was not an idol-worshipping Egyptian rather a believer in the true and living God.

When you stop to think that your funeral and burial are the last public testimonies you will ever give, it makes you want to plan carefully. Making your last will and testament is important, but don't neglect your last witness and testimony.

Some Christians are really into making their own funeral fancy – getting a fancy and expensive casket, a good gravesite, nice song selections, etc. If that is your plan, save that money and put it to good use for the Kingdom of God. Nobody is going to be impressed by your fancy expensive funeral service and you certainly will not enjoy it.

After I and Karen kick the bucket, the U of A Medical College is going to come and get our dead bodies and use them for their students. If our bodies were mangled due to a car accident, make sure that our bodies should be burned extra crispy.

B. JACOB'S BLESSINGS TO JOSEPH'S SONS

Genesis 48:1-4 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. 2 And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. 3 Then 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, (1) I will make you fruitful and

multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and (2) give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'

Can you imagine the thrill that fills the heart of this old man? Here comes Joseph, his favorite son, with his own two sons. Jacob never dreamed he would see Joseph again because he thought he had been killed. Yet he sees Joseph elevated to this important position in Egypt, and he can trace the way how God had worked out the affairs of his life. Jacob had been in Egypt for 17 years now. He is a 147 years old man and is dying. But Jacob has come a long way spiritually. He is now trusting God.

There are three specific points to the covenant from God to Jacob:

(1) the nation, (2) the land, and (3) the blessing

God already fulfilled the first and third promises. The reason that you and I are sitting down with the Bible right now is that God has fulfilled two-thirds of this promise which He promised thousands of years ago.

The second one is not fulfilled yet. The Jews do not have the complete land of Israel yet. Yes, they have a little sliver of it, but it is certainly a bone of contention. When they get the land from the hand of God, they will live there in peace. They will own property and pay no taxes. That sounds like a paradise of the Millennium, doesn't it? Yes, that is what it will be.

C. THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIBE OF EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

Genesis 48:5-6 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. 6 Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

These two grandsons, the two sons of Joseph, will each become a tribe. There is no tribe of Joseph, but there were the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that makes 13 in any man's mathematics. Yet the Bible counts 12 tribes.

Here is the secret: the tribe of Levi was not counted as a tribe. They became the priestly tribe and were not given any land or territory but were scattered as priests throughout the other tribes. So they were not counted as a tribe.

By the way, Ephraim and Manasseh are over 17 years old because they were born before Jacob came to Egypt.

D. THE LAST SHALL BE THE FIRST

Genesis 48:7-16 But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." 8 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?" 9 And 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." 10 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. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" 12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 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 him. 14 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. 15 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, 16 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."

The 'right hand' in the Bible always has the idea of the favored position because generally speaking, the 'right hand' is the hand of strength and skill.

Ephraim is to become the leader above Manasseh. Later on, we will see that the tribe of Manasseh marched under the banner of the tribe of Ephraim in the wilderness march, as described in the Book of Numbers. Joshua came out of the tribe of Ephraim.

This was fulfilled in Israel's history. Both tribes were blessed, but Ephraim was greater as a tribe, even to the point where the name "Ephraim" was used to refer to the whole northern nation of Israel.

For the 5th time in the Book of Genesis, we meet a reversal of the birth order. God had chosen Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; and Joseph, not Reuben; and now He would choose Ephraim over Manasseh. Joseph was upset with what his father did and tried to change his hands, but Jacob was guided by God and knew what he was doing. This is the only recorded instance of Joseph being displeased with his father or anybody else.

In v14-16, we see the Trinity. First, "*God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,*" is God the Father. Second, "*The God who has fed me all my life long to this day,*" is about the Holy Spirit. The word "fed" here is the Hebrew word "Rahah," which in Hebrew is "shepherd." This is the first mention of God as a shepherd, which became a common figure for God as He related to His people, watching over them, caring for them, keeping them, sustaining them. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of taking care of and providing for the people.

Then, finally, the Son is seen as "*the Angel who has redeemed me from all evil.*" Here is the first mention of redemption in the Bible. Who is the redeeming angel? Jesus. Throughout the OT He was called the Angel of the Lord.

And here Jacob, prophesying now and blessing Joseph, spoke of the Father, God of his fathers, the work of the Holy Spirit feeding me, shepherding me, tending over me, then the work of Jesus Christ redeeming me.

E. GOD'S WAY, NOT MAN'S WAY

Genesis 48:17-22 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. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for 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; but truly

his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 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. 22 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.”

Jacob knew exactly what he intended to do. He deliberately chose the second-born to give a greater blessing than the firstborn. Joseph had better accept this because he is not the oldest, either. He happens to be one of the youngest.

This is truly a passing of the torch to Joseph. Jacob was the last of the three great patriarchs to pass from the scene.

Before we close, we need to think about God’s way and His will in our life. If we want to know the will of God, our attitude needs to be right. Here are some guidelines as to how we can play our part in arriving at the right decisions:

1) We must be willing to think.

God made us thinking beings, and He guides our minds as we think things out in His presence.

2) We must be willing to think ahead and weigh the long-term consequences of alternative courses of action.

Often we can only see what is wise and right, and what is foolish and wrong, as we think through the long-term issues.

3) We must be willing to take godly advice.

There are always people who know the Bible, human nature, and our own gifts and limitations better than we do. To say, “No” to godly advice is saying, “Yes” to the unnecessary consequences that follow.

4) We must be willing to be ruthlessly honest with ourselves.

We must ask ourselves why we feel a particular course of action will be right and make ourselves give reasons.

5) We must be willing to wait on the Lord.

“Wait on the Lord” is a constant refrain in the Book of Psalms and it is a necessary word because the Lord often keeps us waiting. While we wait on the Lord, we get to know His heart and His will; and we get to grow in godly characters. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God.

What God will give us in the place of what we give Him is infinitely better. If I have learned nothing else about God in my years as a Christian, I have learned that God’s plans are always better than my plans. We don’t need to be afraid to commit our unknown future to the All Knowing God.