

Reading: Genesis 48:1-22

Theme: Blessings and Preference

Jacob was an old man and knew his time to die would soon come. News was sent to Joseph that his father was ill. He goes to see him with his two sons. This was an opportunity for Jacob to show he was prepared for his death. As Jacob neared the end of his life, his thoughts were on the future promises of God. He did not die a dejected old man hanging on to past memories. It is sad to see people who can only look back on certain highlights of their earlier years and have nothing to look forward to! Jacob's death was going to be victorious for his faith was in God and he saw a future hope with the eye of faith.

Iain Murray wrote in Dr MLJ's biography that he spent the last months of his life preparing for heaven - MLJ said *'We do not give enough time to death and to our going on. It is a very strange thing this: the one certainty, yet we do not think about it... People say about sudden death, "It is a wonderful way to go." I have come to the conclusion that is quite wrong... The hope of a sudden death is based upon the fear of death. But death is not something to slip past, it should be victorious.'* [Volume 2 P.730 & 731]

How will we face our own death – when or how it comes? This is a challenge to us all - as one day we too will have to face our own death. We may, or may not have opportunity to prepare for it even as a believer, but we will still go to heaven; but if our dying process is lengthy, then we should turn our thoughts to prepare our hearts to being there with our Saviour and all the wonders heaven will hold for us. Let's note 4 things from this chapter, a chapter I'd not choose to preach from, but has arisen in our studies, will likely be the only time I'll preach on it and is suited to uncertain Covid times!

1. Origin owned (v1-4)

The blessings of Isaac and Jacob to their children are unique in ancient writings. This is to be expected, because no other family had the Lord give them promises that would result in the blessing of all

the earth. Remarkably the patriarchs - including Joseph - were part of God's plan for the salvation of the world. Jacob in his weakness, as he hears Joseph and his grandsons were on their way to see him, rallied his strength to speak to them from his sick bed. As he addressed the 3 of them, he took them back to the source of the blessings he had known - to God Almighty, recalling the time when this God appeared to him at Luz (Bethel) and blessed him (probably 35:9-15.)

The blessings mentioned are important items in God's covenant with Abraham. They included the promise of "*going to make you fruitful*" and to have Canaan "*as an everlasting possession*" for his descendants. It was important to remind them of these promises, as all his family were living temporarily in Egypt. God had promised him Canaan as a permanent possession. Jacob was urging Joseph and his sons not to focus on their possessions in Egypt, to promises made by princes, pharaohs of this world, but to fix their sights on Divine promises and their heavenly inheritance.

We are to trace every blessing back to its source - God Himself. This is true for every physical and spiritual blessing in our salvation. Always go back to our God - all He has done and will do for us. 2 Corinthians 4:18 reminds us "*So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*" This is not always easy to do, especially when the road is rough and steep, but we are to run life's race fixing our eyes upon the Lord Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.

2. Adoption made (v5-12)

Jacob declared he would treat Joseph's two sons as his own sons. Jacob makes this clear by comparing his grandsons to his two oldest sons - Reuben and Simeon. Ephraim and Manasseh became joint heirs along with their uncles of the promises made to Abraham and were treated as Jacob's firstborn sons (1 Chronicles 5:1 & 2). They became tribes alongside the other 11. Jacob honoured Joseph - as

through his sons, Joseph would have a double share in the land of promise and a place of prominence in the future history of Israel. If Jacob hadn't been tricked into marrying Leah, then Joseph would have been his firstborn! Jacob is re-adjusting the situation here.

As Jacob told them this, he recalls the death of his beloved Rachel. Probably all the grief of that incident hit him afresh and her early death, giving birth to Benjamin, also meant that Jacob could not have any more children by her, so by adopting Joseph's children, he made up for his loss. This account of her death emphasises her burial at Ephrath - known as Bethlehem. Later Jacob told them he wanted to be buried in Canaan and so telling his son and adopted sons to remember their inheritance lay in Canaan, not Egypt.

We are to often remember our true home is in heaven and we are not to become too settled in this world and too attached to all it offers. We have seen previously we are pilgrims, are passing through this temporary, passing away world. It should encourage us to remember our loved ones who are believers and have gone ahead of us. One day we will be gathered together there in that great family reunion in our Father's house.

Jacob having been upset in remembering Rachel and her death, now seemed momentarily confused and he asks "*Who are these?*" Also his eyes were failing because of old age (v10) so he may have been double-checking as he didn't want anyone to dupe him as he had done to his blind father! Joseph brought his sons near to Jacob who kissed and embraced them (v10). The boys would have been around 20 years old at this time - they were born before Jacob came to Egypt some 17 years earlier. Jacob felt very privileged to be alive to know Joseph's sons - as he never expected to see Joseph again! Writers suggest his actions were symbolic gestures to show their adoption as his own sons. As Joseph receives the boys back from his father, he and possibly the boys, prostrated themselves before Jacob out of gratitude and respect.

How thankful are we to the great God of heaven for His adopting, making us His sons and daughters? We have the incredible privilege of adoption as God's children - one of the highest He can give us - as it means that we are made heirs and joint heirs with the Lord Jesus Christ. Manasseh and Ephraim had great privileges - given because they were of the bloodline of Joseph, but we have far greater privileges given us, as we were of our father the devil, are children of sinful rebellious dust and deserve no good thing from God. We have every reason to bow down with our face to the ground in adoration, thankfulness, praise and appreciation for what God has done for us in Jesus.

3. Blessings Switched (v13-20)

Joseph organised his sons to receive the blessing and as Manasseh was the older, he is placed at his father's right-hand and Ephraim at his left-hand (v13). *"But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn."* (v14) - blind Isaac was tricked into giving the main blessing to the younger son, but blind Jacob deliberately chose the younger son!

The actual word of blessing is in two parts and applies to both sons: 1st part is addressed to Joseph - representing the boys (v15 & 16) and the 2nd part is addressed to the grandsons (v20). Sandwiched between these two parts is Joseph's protest of displeasure and Jacob's refusal to give way (v17-19).

In the **1st part** of the blessing is a threefold calling upon God - twice as God and once as the Angel. **First** He is the God of his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. Jacob was not pioneering any new religion or religious thoughts, but was the heir to revelation first made to his grandfather and then handed on through his father to himself for the benefit of future generations. Jacob's descendants, like their

forefathers, were to walk with this God - live a life to please the Lord in whose presence they dwelt. Having been honoured by God's favour and promises, they were **obliged** to live for Him.

Secondly this God was also Jacob's personal God - who had been his Shepherd all his life even to that day. Jacob had many failings of character and conduct, but was aware his life had purpose and meaning and God had cared for him as his Shepherd. This is the first reference in the Bible of God as the Shepherd of His people. Jacob spent his life shepherding and was quick to recognise the Shepherd care of God in his own life.

Thirdly he spoke of the Angel who had delivered him from all harm - here the NIV lets us down in its translation as most other versions catch the force of the word translated "*delivered*" which is "*redeemed*" - linked to the word for kinsman redeemer. Jacob realised it was God and not any earthly relative who had delivered him from all his fears, even rescued him from his relatives! Again we have another first occurrence, in this use of redemption terminology. A kinsman redeemer was a near relative who had the responsibility of coming to rescue of a relative in serious trouble. It is used of God's action in rescuing the Israelites from Egyptian bondage (Exodus 15:13). The Angel of the Lord acted as Jacob's kinsman redeemer. To need a kinsman redeemer meant that you could not do anything to help yourself. Cunning, plotting and scheming Jacob, had come to realise he needed such a kinsman redeemer and was so glad it was the Angel of the Lord.

This same Angel of the Lord is the one who is our Kinsman Redeemer and has redeemed us from all our sin deserved and He did so when we were helpless and hopeless. We are to realise that in Him we have redemption through His blood - an incredible price was paid to redeem us from slavery to sin and Satan, the curse of the law and the fear of death.

It is to this God, Jacob called on to bless the boys. It is a prayer that they would know the blessings of the covenant God had made with this family. One item in that covenant was the promise of many descendants and so Jacob prays that they may “*increase greatly upon the earth*” - which literally says “*May they become a fishlike multitude in the land*”.

In v17-19 we have Joseph's protest and Jacob's insistence/persistence. Joseph was upset Jacob had switched hands, had given the priority of blessing (*by the right-hand*) to the younger son. Joseph, like those before him and so many since, had to learn covenant blessings are not obtained by natural birth, deserving or background, but are always gifts from the sovereign God. When God chooses to bless, He will bless and nothing will stop that blessing - Esau found that out, as did Joseph when his father refused to move his right hand from Ephraim's head. Jacob knew what he was doing and it is argued Jacob had been shown what to do and was not just being a cantankerous old man!!

Our God is the God who uses the weak and the foolish things of this world to confound the mighty and the wise; who uses the foolishness of preaching to save men and women, boys and girls. He is, in short, the God who does amazing and surprising things.

In the **second part** of the blessing Jacob stresses in the presence of Joseph that Ephraim, the younger son, would be greater than Manasseh and his descendants would become “*a group of nations.*”(v19) The final part of the blessing again did not separate between the brothers - both would be so blessed by God with many descendants that the nation of Israel would use their names in future blessings.

A lot of space is given to Ephraim's position over Manasseh and it stresses what we see many times in Genesis - God's blessings come to those who do not deserve it, who have no natural rights to them.

We can be so thankful for that, because it means we are not saved because we belong to a particular race, family or nation, but is all on account of God's free grace. This passage also prepares us for the future history of the nation - Ephraim did become the dominant tribe in the days of the Judges and after the division centuries later, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was often called Ephraim.

4. Promises Anticipated (v21 & 22)

Jacob having blessed his grandsons; shows he still had his eyes fixed on the promises of God - as in these verses he talks about the land God had promised them - Canaan - calling it *"the land of your fathers"*. Here Jacob uses the plural for 'you' and 'your' talking about the people of Israel, not just Joseph alone. Jacob is sure of God's promises - although his body was failing, his faith is strong. In fact, the writer of Hebrews uses this incident to illustrate Jacob's faith (11:21) *"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff."* His faith stood firm - the land would be given to his descendants as God promised.

Jacob's faith is quite remarkable - as he owned he was about to die, yet his eyes and hope were fixed on the Promised Land. Matthew Henry says *"These words of Jacob furnish us with comfort in reference to the death of our friends: They die; but God shall be with us, and his gracious presence is sufficient to make up the loss: they leave us, but he will never fail us. Further, He will bring us to the land of our fathers, the heavenly Canaan; whither our godly fathers have gone before us. If God be with us while we stay behind in this world, and will receive us shortly to be with those that have gone before to a better world, we ought not to sorrow as those that have no hope."* We are to realise this same God has promised to be with His people to the end of the age and bring us safely through to the *"land of pure delight where saints immortal reign"*. That will be a glorious place to be and the promise of it is secure for all who trust the Lord Jesus as their Saviour.

Jacob gives to Joseph a bonus plot of land - one portion more than his brothers (*NIV foot note*). Joseph, through his sons was inheriting a double portion of the land, but here Jacob singles out a specific portion of land for him. The word translated "*ridge of land*" has been translated in different ways in versions - portion, or mountain slope, the word in the Hebrew is Shechem - the place where Jacob and his family bought land, settled, had a bit of bother and had to move on. It is thought that Jacob had to recapture it from the Amorites at a later date and is an unrecorded incident he refers to here.

Centuries after Israel conquered Canaan the area of Shechem fell within the borders of Manasseh's territory just to the north of Ephraim's. When Israel conquered Canaan, they brought Joseph's remains and buried them at Shechem (Joshua 24:32). Joseph did inherit this portion of land - as his grave!

We would want to give our children many good things in life and even after our days; but the greatest thing we can do is to pray for their salvation and if they have that, then they have the best portion, treasure and an inheritance that will never fade, rot or be corrupted. Whatever we have in this world we have to realise our earthly life's end is a grave. Even though our mortal remains will turn to dust, we can know eternal life in heaven for our immortal souls and on the day of resurrection, our souls and resurrection bodies will be united and we will enjoy all the wonders of our God and Saviour forever and at His right hand will be pleasures for ever more. That is the Promised Land we are going to and it is guaranteed and secure for all who have the Lord Jesus as a Saviour.