

## **Jacob Prepares For Death**

HN 17/10/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 47:28 -48:22, John 13

Study: Genesis 47:28-48:22

Psalms: 31:1-5, 31:15-19, 16:5-9, 16:10-11

Some people leave their affairs in such a mess when they die that it takes years for someone to sort things out – things usually meaning their property and finances. Set your house in order before you die we are told. But there are more things to set in order than just material things. What a blessing it is when a man leaves his family in good spiritual condition, when his children can praise God for the teaching and example of a godly father.

Jacob was approaching death. His pilgrimage in this world was nearing the end. He set about to set his house in order before he died. He did not give instructions about his wealth, telling who was to get what and so on. He gave instructions to Joseph about his burial and then gave his blessing, or rather the blessing of God, to his sons.

*The days of the years of my pilgrimage are 130 years ; few and evil have been the days of the years of my life and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage (47:9).* Jacob saw his life as a pilgrimage or a journey, and that journey was coming to an end. He began life by deception and then was deceived himself by Laban and his own sons. Jacob the ‘grasper’. A life of deception and dishonesty will not be an easy life.

But at this age of 130, he received his favourite son back from the dead, as it were. He enjoyed 17 more years settled with his family and being provided for by Joseph. Jacob never forgot his early years and how God spoke to him at Bethel. He recalled how God kept his promise to bring him back to the land. And when he came down to Egypt, again God spoke saying *I will surely bring you up again (46:4).*

Jacob’s forefathers walked before God and so did Jacob. The Lord was his shepherd *all my life long to this day.* God preserved him from death a number of times and he also preserved his soul – *he has redeemed me from all evil.*

It is easy to disregard the past as we busy ourselves with the present and the future. But the wise and Godly person will take a sober view of their past. They will learn from their mistakes and they will praise God for the blessings they have received. *Praise the Lord O my soul and forget not all his benefits* – was what the Psalmist sang (103:2). Memory is a precious gift of God but it must be sanctified by the HS like the rest of our being. Remembering the sins of others is not sanctifying.

How often do you stop to remember- and to thank God for all his blessings? Jacob remembered his past – unhappiness was there but there were also the blessings and the promises of God. He knew where he had come from and knew where he was going. The

greater Jacob, even our Lord Jesus Christ could also look back at few and evil days. But he knew where he came from and where he was going (John 13:3). That was his great comfort and strength. Do you find that in your life?

As death approached, Jacob prepared for the future – he was a busy man as he approached death! Because of the promise of God, he had a future – a glorious future. He had a sure and certain hope. He looked beyond the promise of the land of Canaan to his inheritance in the heavenly country (Hebrews 11).

### **His Burial**

How did Jacob prepare for his death? The first thing we see is his concern for his place of burial. He asked Joseph to swear a solemn oath that he would not bury him in Egypt but would carry his body to the Promised Land. He wanted to be buried in the cave at Machpelah.

The last time we saw such an oath being sworn it was Abraham asking his servant not to take Isaac out of Canaan. God promised this land to Abraham to Isaac and also Jacob. Jacob was presently in Egypt but he knew this was not his home. In terms of the resurrection at the last Day, it made no material difference where his body was buried, but it was of great symbolic importance that he be buried in Canaan. This demonstrated the faith of Jacob – he believed the promise of God that one day his descendants would take possession of this land.

*So Israel bowed himself at the head of his bed* (or staff in LXX). Jacob worshipped God in thankfulness for Joseph's agreement regarding his burial. As he faced death, he faced a future of hope. Did he have a vision of the glories of the Promised Land?

### **Blessing his sons**

Apart from arranging his place of burial, Jacob had another very important task to do before he died. He carried the promises of God. The promise given to Abraham had been passed on to him. They were yet to be fulfilled. Who would carry them in the next generation? Would they automatically go to his eldest son? That was expected, but as we know God is the one who chooses – human merit accounts for nothing before him.

How do we know? We saw it with Isaac and Ishmael – God said in *Isaac shall your seed be called*. We saw it with Esau and Jacob – *the older will serve the younger*. So we should not be surprised at a divine choice being made again. And that is just what we do see. But before this, we see another divine prerogative, another act of divine grace - adoption.

Joseph rushed to his father's bedside with his two sons when he heard that he was sick. Jacob sat up in bed and told Joseph about the promises of God. He told how God appeared to him at Bethel and promised his descendants would become a great nation and they would possess the land of Canaan. Already his family was multiplying rapidly here in Goshen (47:27). But they would be strangers in this foreign land for 400 years (15:13).

Before choosing a son to inherit the blessing, Jacob was led by God to adopt the sons of Joseph as his own. Ephraim and Manasseh who were born before he came to Egypt would

be regarded as his own sons, just like Reuben and Simeon. They would join his own sons to make up the 12 tribes of Israel – the priestly tribe of Levi was not allotted a territory.

‘Adoption is an act of Gods free grace whereby we are received into the number, and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God’ (Shorter Catechism 34).

We find this doctrine in the New Testament with reference to ourselves entering the Kingdom of God. God sent his Son to *redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons*(Gal atians 4:5). Under the law, we werēslaves , but in Christ, we have been adopted into the family of God as sons. By adoption we are *children of God* (Romans 8:16, I John 3:1). And as sons we are heirs, *heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ* (Romans 8:17).

This is a doctrine that we delight in. This amazing doctrine tells us that we are no longer slaves but children and heirs to the wonderful inheritance of our heavenly Father. Slaves have no inheritance but you have an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled kept in heaven for you (I Peter 1:4).

Having adopted Joseph’s sons, he proceeded to bless them. We find divine sovereignty in election again displayed in this blessing. Joseph carefully placed his eldest son Manasseh on his left so that as he approached his father the right hand of blessing would fall on him. But Jacob chose to put his right hand across on the head of Ephraim and his left on Manasseh. Joseph got upset and tried to move his father’s hands. Maybe he thought that as his father was blind he was getting mixed up. But the hands remained. *I know my son, I know* said Jacob. *The younger brother shall be greater* said Jacob as he blessed his newly adopted sons.

And so the birthright was not given to the eldest son Reuben, for he had defiled his father’s bed (I Corinthians 5:1). The birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, and the youngest of these sons, as we see in this passage. God’s ways are indeed higher than our ways – and we are immensely thankful for that. For our God is a God of grace. In love, he adopted us and chose us as his children. *God demonstrates his own love to toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us* (Romans 5:8).

What amazing love! God not only saved us from sin but also adopted us as his children, as heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. Grace that has given us an inheritance in heaven. Do you by faith look forward to the better country, the heavenly country as Jacob did? Do you look forward to that inheritance kept for you as a child of God? *By faith Jacob, when he was dying blessed each of Joseph’s sons and worshipped leaning on the top of his staff.*

*Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon*