

## JACOB'S LAST DAYS

### TEXT: GENESIS 48:1-22

### INTRODUCTION:

1. Genesis 47 can be divided into three parts:
  - (1) First, Joseph introduces his father and brothers to Pharaoh (47:1-12).
  - (2) Then we have a description of Joseph's policies as the governor of Egypt (47:13-26). A summary of the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine has already been given in 41:53-57.
  - (3) Then we have a very interesting description of the last days of Jacob (47:27ff).
2. John Philipps said, "Joseph was the greatest benefactor Egypt ever had. In a single stroke he broke the power of the feudal system...and made the throne supreme" (*Exploring Genesis*).
3. "The main idea of Joseph's policy was to take necessary steps during the years of plenty in order to economize for the years of famine" (W.H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis*).
4. In his commentary on the book of Genesis, W.H. Griffith Thomas referred to an important archaeological discovery. "It is impossible to pass by the recent reference to a discovery by one of the foremost of modern Egyptologists, Brugsch Bey, of a hieroglyphic record of the failure of the Nile to rise for seven consecutive years, which resulted in a terrible famine. According to the discoverer, the date of the failure of the Nile to rise was B.C. 1700, and this corresponds exactly to that which has been recognized by students of chronology as the date of the story of this chapter."
5. Archaeological discoveries always confirm the accuracy and trustworthiness of Scripture. They never contradict Scripture.

6. The food of the seven good years was stored up against the seven years of famine. When the famine came and there was no bread in the land, the people came to Joseph according to Pharaoh's orders (cf. 41:55).
7. The people came to Joseph and they bought corn with their money (47:13, 14).
8. "And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence?" (47:15).
9. When the money was all spent and they still needed food during the famine, they bought food with their cattle (47:47:16, 17).
10. Finally, when there were no more cattle for them to bring, they offered themselves and their lands for bread (47:18-20).
11. Joseph eventually bought up all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, with the exception of the portion that belonged to the priests (47:21, 22).
12. The Egyptian people accepted Joseph's plans with readiness and thankfulness (47:25).
13. Joseph's wise policies sprang from his relation to God. Pharaoh recognized this when he said, "Can we find such a one as this is, a man in whom the Spirit of God is?" (41:38).
14. Joseph's life is a testimony to the fact that a man can occupy the highest position in society, and glorify God; that a man can be a statesman, putting forward policies that affect nations, and yet all the while be a humble child of God.
15. The immediate outcome of Joseph's wise policy was the salvation and protection of the entire country of Egypt.
16. Not only did Joseph's plan save Egypt. Genesis 41:57 says, "And all countries came into Egypt to Joseph for to buy corn; because that the famine was so sore in all lands."

17. We have been focusing on how Joseph's policies preserved the family of Jacob, but it should be noted that Joseph's policies were a great blessing to people from "all" of the countries.

18. In this Joseph is a picture and type of Christ, who will rule all nations with a rod of iron (Revelation 12:5; 19:15).

19. Genesis 47:27 to the end of Genesis 49 deals with the last days of Jacob.

### **I. JACOB'S REQUEST**

### **II. JACOB'S BLESSING**

### **III. JACOB'S PROMISE**

#### **I. JACOB'S REQUEST (47:27-31)**

1. The events surrounding the death of Jacob are full of detail, emphasizing their importance.
2. In this section, Joseph takes a secondary position, and his father Jacob is the prominent figure.
3. Since Joseph dominates the last fourteen chapters of the book of Genesis, it is easy to forget that Jacob is still the head of the family.
4. Jacob is the great patriarch. Jacob is Israel, the head of the chosen people, the nation of Israel.
5. When the seven years of famine came to an end, Jacob and his family did not return to Canaan. Genesis 47:27 tells us that the children of Israel "grew and multiplied exceedingly."
6. This was all part of God's plan for Israel (46:3).
7. Jacob lived an additional 17 years after moving into Egypt (47:28).

8. As Jacob drew near to the end of his life, he knew that it was God's plan that he would die in Egypt, and not in Canaan. And so he called for his son Joseph, and asked him not to bury him in Egypt (47:29-31).
9. It was a solemn request. "Put thy hand under my thigh" (47:29) must have been a custom at that time because Abraham said the same thing to his servant when he sent him out to get a wife for Isaac (24:2).
10. Jacob's desire to return to Canaan seems to be associated with his belief in God's promise at Beer-sheba, "I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again" (46:4).
11. Jacob believed that God would fulfil His promises, and that includes giving the promised land to him and to his seed.
12. Joseph, of course, immediately agreed to his father's request (47:31). Jacob's request must have had a great impact on Joseph because later on Joseph requested the same thing for himself (Gen. 50:24-26).

## II. JACOB'S BLESSING (48:1-20)

1. Not long after Joseph swore to his father that he would bury him in Canaan, he heard of his father's illness, and, knowing that the end was near, went to see him, taking along with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (48:1).
2. "And Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed" (48:2). Knowing his death was imminent, Jacob recalled the past, and told Joseph that God had appeared to him at Luz, that is Bethel, "house of God" (48:3).
3. Once again, Jacob affirmed the promise that God had first made to his grandfather Abraham, and then to his father Isaac, and had repeatedly made to him – "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" (48:4).

4. Then Jacob made a surprising announcement that Joseph's two sons were to be adopted by Jacob. They were to be counted among his own sons, not Joseph's. From now on, they were to be regarded no longer as their father's children, but as their grandfather's, taking the place of Reuben and Simeon among the twelve sons and twelve tribes (48:5).
5. Any other sons that Joseph might have were to remain their father's, but Ephraim and Manasseh were to be separated from Joseph and to belong in name and fact to Jacob (48:6). This was significant as far as the inheritance was concerned.
6. Although Reuben was the firstborn of Leah, he had lost the birthright because of the gross sin of lying with his father's concubine. Genesis 35:22 says, "that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it" (cf. 49:3, 4).
7. The birthright was then passed on to Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, who was intended by Jacob to be his first and only wife. Furthermore, Joseph received the birthright because he saved all his father's house from famine.
8. The birthright going to Joseph is referred to in I Chronicles 5:1, 2, "Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's)."
9. Joseph had received the double portion of inheritance, and his two sons were numbered among the 12 tribes of Israel as the recipients.
10. Jacob's remarks about Rachel seem to be out of place, but they are not. The memory of her and her death stayed with Jacob over the years, and somehow he wished to honour her memory by giving her three tribes among the twelve: Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh.

11. Genesis 48:10 says, “Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see.” The dimness of his sight prevented Jacob from recognizing Joseph’s two sons (48:8).
12. When Joseph told him who they were, he asked that they might be brought near so that he might bless them (48:9, 10).
13. How beautiful are the words of Jacob, recorded in verse 11 – “I had not thought to see thy face; and lo, God hath showed me also thy seed” (48:11).
14. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “God is ever surprising His people with added blessing beyond our expectations, because He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think” (*Genesis*).
15. Then Joseph placed one son at Jacob’s one side, and the other at the other side, so that his elder son Manasseh might have the blessing from Jacob’s right hand, and the younger son Ephraim the blessing from his left hand (48:12, 13).
16. But this was not to be.
17. By the direction of the Holy Spirit, Jacob deliberately and knowingly stretched forth his hands and crossed them, so that the firstborn received the blessing from the left hand (48:14).
18. Then Joseph and his two sons were blessed by Jacob (48:15, 16).
19. The threefold testimony to God as the God of his fathers, the God of his own life, and the God who had preserved him, is very striking (48:15, 16).
20. The word “Angel” is usually used in reference to the angel of the LORD, a pre-incarnate appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ. This was the man who wrestled with him until the breaking of the day.
21. Genesis 32:30 says, “And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel: for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.”

22. The threefold reference to God is similar to the Aaronic blessing found in Numbers 6:24-26. "The LORD bless thee, and keep thee: The LORD make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The LORD lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."
23. And we are reminded of Isaiah the prophet's words in Isaiah 6:3 – "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory."
24. Jacob prayed that God would bless Ephraim and Manasseh. They were to be incorporated into the family of Israel, and also to "grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" (48:16).
25. This was fulfilled in the subsequent history of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. After the division during the time of King Jeroboam, the name Ephraim often referred to the ten tribes comprising Israel's Northern Kingdom.
26. In accordance with tradition, Joseph was displeased that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, the younger son, and he attempted to remove it, telling Jacob that Manasseh was the firstborn (48:17, 18).
27. However, Jacob surprised Joseph by saying, "I know it, my son, I know it" (48:19). It had been done wittingly and deliberately, for Ephraim the younger son was to be the greater (48:20).
28. This passing over of the firstborn is one of the most striking features of the book of Genesis – Seth instead of Cain; Shem instead of Japheth; Abraham instead of Haran; Isaac instead of Ishmael; and Jacob instead of Esau.
29. And now it was Ephraim instead of Manasseh. In doing this, God displayed His sovereignty. God's blessings do not necessarily follow the line of natural privilege.
30. The Bible says, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8, 9).

31. Hebrews 11:21 says, “By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.”

32. Jacob is only mentioned once in Hebrews 11, the great chapter on faith. Out of his long life (147 years), the only event that is singled out by the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews and mentioned as Jacob’s act of faith is when Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph.

33. So Jacob had the last word, and Joseph fully accepted it as the sovereign will of God.

### **III. JACOB’S PROMISE (48:21, 22)**

1. The closing word of promise was Jacob’s last recorded conversation with Joseph (48:21, 22). In Genesis 49 we have Jacob’s final words to all of his sons. And after that, he died (49:33).
2. Jacob assured Joseph that though he himself was about to die, God would be with them and bring them again to the land of their fathers (48:21).
3. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, “Hope is an integral part of the Christian life...Faith looks upward, Hope looks onward. Faith accepts, Hope expects. Faith is concerned with the present promising, Hope is concerned with the thing promised. Faith appropriates, Hope anticipates. Faith is always occupied with the past and present, Hope lives entirely in the future” (*Genesis*).
4. Repeatedly the Psalmist prayed, “My hope is in thee.”
5. The Bible says we are “to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Hebrews 6:18, 19).
6. Furthermore, Joseph was granted “one portion above” his brethren, the portion which his father had taken out of the hand of the Amorite (48:22).



7. This incident is not otherwise recorded in the book of Genesis.
8. In his final days, Jacob rested his heart upon what God had done for him, and on what God had promised to him and to his seed (48:21).
9. Someone said that in Jacob's last days on earth, with faith he looked upward; with gratitude he looked backward; with love he looked outward; and with hope he looked onward.
10. That is a good testimony for a man whose life was often impaired by deceitfulness and faithlessness.
11. But as we look at the sunset of Jacob's life, we see that the one thing that stands out is the reality of God's presence and promise. All through the story the one theme is God (48:3, 11, 15, 20, 21).
12. W.H. Griffith Thomas said, "The troubled waters of Jacob's life had now settled and cleared, and were flowing placidly in a quiet stream of fellowship with God. He rested his heart upon what God had done for him, and on what God had promised to him and to his seed" (Genesis).
13. In Shakespeare's play, Macbeth, referring to a man who repented before he died, Malcolm says, "Nothing in his life became him like the leaving of it." Those words could apply to Jacob.
14. Consider this contrast – when Jacob first met Pharaoh, he spoke of his days as "few and evil" (47:9), but in his last words to Joseph he speaks of the Angel who had "redeemed him from all evil" (48:16).

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. Students of Scripture have pointed out that this picture of Jacob's last days "is one of extreme beauty and suggestiveness, and may well be taken as a type and model for old age today" (W. H. Griffith Thomas).
2. The last words that Jacob said directly to Joseph are recorded in Genesis 48:22. Jacob gave Joseph a piece of land that he had taken in battle from the Amorites – "which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow."

3. This is the only reference to Jacob's skills as a soldier, but considering that he lived many years surrounded by hostile heathens, we can assume he was an accomplished warrior.
4. Sixteen hundred years later, we read that our Lord came "to a city of Samaria, which is called Sychar, near to the parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (John 4:5).
5. "Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus therefore, being wearied with his journey, sat thus on the well..." (John 4:6).
6. Our Lord had a divine appointment. John 4:4 says, "And he must needs go through Samaria."
7. A woman was saved there at that well, and she left her waterpot, and went into the city, and started telling everyone about Jesus.
8. John 4:39 says, "And many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman, which testified, He told me all that ever I did."