

March 24, 2013
Sunday Evening Service
Series: The Life of Jacob
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Genesis 48-49.

1. How many evidences can you find in chapters 48 and 49 that Jacob had learned to trust God?
2. Why didn't Jacob know who Joseph's sons were?
3. Why did Jacob bless the younger son over the older son?
4. When Jacob was gathered to his people, where did he go?

Jacob's Blessings Genesis 48-49

We have arrived at the end of the Jacob story. It has been a wonderful trip through the will of God. God's hand was all over Jacob's life even when he was unaware of it. And when Jacob did become aware of God's hand, it was always a learning experience if not a painful experience.

I have found the study of Jacob's life to be most profitable because in so many ways I am like Jacob was. I, too, believe that God mapped out my life even before I was born. But I, too, have not always understood the moves God brought about in my life, even though I was sure I knew something about His will. I, like Jacob, have often learned to trust God only because God put me in difficult circumstances where I had no choice. I have grown to trust God's leading, even if I don't understand it or cannot explain it. But I also am sure I have many more lessons about faith to learn.

Is it not true that you also have learned that you and Jacob walk similar paths as you grow in Christ? As we come to the end of the story, let's observe how Jacob made promises about the future because he fully believed God would keep His promises.

Jacob Blessed Joseph's Sons (48:1-22).

Here is an interesting scenario. Jacob decided that Joseph's sons were his own sons (vv.1-6). It was not so much a literal conclusion as a conclusion about inheritance. He could do so because Jacob was fully convinced that God had kept His promise to him. *And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession'"* (48:3-4). The story of his life proves that God did bless Jacob just as He had promised He would. God did multiply his family and made him a large company of people so that a clan of seventy people came to Egypt. God promised to give the "land" to Jacob's offspring as an everlasting possession.

But Jacob was now in Egypt not in Canaan. Did he still trust God? Yes. He indicated to Joseph without a hint of doubt that God will continue to keep His promise (vv.5-6). *"And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance"* (48:5-6). Yep! Jacob fully expected Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to receive a chunk of land as an inheritance in the promised land. They did. More than that, in the coming kingdom that portion of Jacob's posterity will still have an inheritance. "Through many hardships, toils and snares," Jacob learned that God's grace will carry out God's promises.

My father's mother died shortly after he was born. His father died when Dad was fifteen, and he was suddenly on his own. He used to talk about living in the trailer down by the junk yard all alone in life. I can remember in his later years he would sit at family gathers watching his children, grand children, and great grandchildren. And through all the wonderful noise and bedlam he would say, "I can remember when I was

all alone. God has certainly blessed me.” Can we draw near to the end and honestly assess all that God has done for us and have full confidence in God to keep His promise of eternal life? People with that kind confidence are not like Hugo Chevez whose last words to those standing at his bedside were, “I don’t want to die . . . please don’t let me die.”

In the process, Joseph thought Jacob messed up the blessing (vv.8-22). Jacob appeared to cross up the blessing (vv.8-16). Maybe that was because Jacob didn’t know who the boys were according to verse eight. Doesn’t it seem a bit strange that Jacob did not know Joseph’s children when he had just promised to include them in the inheritance? We know that Jacob’s eyes were dim with age (v.10). Therefore, his question was probably a matter of identification (which is which?) since he was about to bless them.

In answering his father’s question, Joseph acknowledged that the sons born to him were the direct blessing of God (v.9). Father Jacob agreed that God had indeed been good. He attributed his opportunity to see Joseph and his sons to God’s blessing (v.11). So, in order to proceed with the blessing, Joseph arranged the sons correctly according to age so that Jacob would bless the oldest son first (v.13). Jacob intentionally crossed his hands and blessed the younger son first (vv.14-16). In the blessing, Jacob admitted that God had been his shepherd even when he did not know it or appreciate it. *And he blessed Joseph and said, “The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day” (48:15).* Then Jacob said something pretty amazing. Jacob called on “Jesus Christ” to bless the boys (v.16). Where is that in the text? If we go back to the incident to which Jacob alluded here, we realize that the angel who gave him the promise of inheritance was a pre-incarnate appearance of Christ.

All of that was well and good except that Jacob was bestowing the blessing on the wrong son – or so Joseph thought. Not to worry. Jacob corrected Joseph’s misunderstanding (vv.17-22). This is sort of a “like father like son” situation (v.17-18). Way back when Jacob knew God’s will, that the younger would serve the elder. Therefore, he tricked his father into giving the blessing accordingly. Joseph, on the other hand, was not aware of God’s will for his sons and assumed that Jacob, like grandfather Isaac, was goofing up God’s will (v.18). So, Jacob stopped to explain God’s will and then proceeded therewith (v.19-20).

Jacob also gave a promise to Joseph based on God’s promise to him (vv.21-22). Apparently, he had won some piece of property through

battle from some Amorite people. Maybe this was a reference to Shechem? Though Jacob did not have a deed to the property, he had God’s promise and that was sufficient for him to confidently give the property to Joseph. We do know that at his death Joseph was buried in Shechem (Joshua 24:32). Regardless of what the property was or how Jacob got it, he offered it to Joseph on the basis of faith in God.

Jacob Blessed the “12” (49:1-33).

Jacob gathered his boys together and said, “I will tell you what will happen to you in days to come” (vv.1-2). Much of these blessings came to pass in their posterity and continue to be fulfilled. Which in reality causes liberal scholars to conclude that it was a fanciful writing completed many years later and then stuck in the Jacob story by copyists. How else can we explain Jacob’s accuracy about his sons? Maybe inspiration from God?

Let’s start with the firstborn son Reuben (vv.3-4), since that is where Jacob started. For the most part, he went in chronological order from oldest to youngest. Of Reuben’s line Jacob promised that they would be preeminent in dignity and power (v.3). Because he was the firstborn, he was first in dignity (exaltation) and in strength. In many cases, the firstborn child often owns certain privileges. That was the debate between Jacob and Esau.

But the Hebrew word behind the word *dignity* also refers to being puffed up, rising up, or exalting self. This is God’s accusation against the King of Tyre who represented Satan. *Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because your heart is proud [KJV “lifted up”], and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god--” (Ezekiel 28:2).* That character flaw might be the reason Reuben’s people would also be unstable as water (v.4). Because of his pride, Reuben was as reckless as torrents of water. Like water out of control, the arrogant Reuben refused to control his lust and violated his father’s bed by having relations with Jacob’s concubine. He forfeited all his privilege as firstborn because he refused to control his passions.

Simeon and Levi (vv.5-7) are taken together. They were blood brothers having the same mother and same father. No doubt they hung out together. Bad company does corrupt good manners. And so these

guys did much harm because of uncontrolled anger. They were notorious for weapons and violence. They willfully killed fellow humans. They so disregarded life that after they stole the oxen from Shechem, they hamstrung them. These boys demonstrated the opposite of God's command, "Be angry and sin not."

The result would be quite sad (vv.6a,7). Jacob disavowed any relationship to their council (v.6a). He still recognized them as his sons, but he was not about to seek advice from them. It made for an uneasy relationship between father and sons. Jacob leveled a curse against them (v.7). It was not just a stinging rebuke but a prayer for divine intervention against them because of their uncontrolled wrath. They were indeed divided and scattered. We know that when the land was divided, Levi's posterity had no inheritance in the land other than 40 cities. Instead God chose them to be priests whose line served in the tabernacle and temple. Simeon did receive property, but they were eventually absorbed into the larger tribe of Judah.

Judah received great promise (vv.8-12). Jacob promised that his brothers would recognize his authority (vv.8-9). That authority would be displayed as Judah enjoyed victory over his enemies. His brothers (the other tribes) would come and bow down to Judah, which indicates that in the future the king would be in Judah. Right along with that promise is the certainty that Judah's posterity would be like a young lion full of energy and power that captures its prey.

A greater promise was that the scepter would not depart from him (v.10). This is another picture similar to the lion picture. Judah was pictured as a ruler bearing a scepter. That was clearly fulfilled in King David and his posterity for many years. But the fact that the "scepter will not depart" means that God still has plans for the tribe of Judah. Judah would be the tribe of kings "until Shiloh comes." That is a common translation of this phrase. The ESV says *until the tribute comes to him*. What does that mean? No doubt the best translation is "until He comes to who it belongs." It is a reference to Jesus Christ, born in the line of David and Judah, who will come to reign over the restored nation of Israel; yea, over the world. To the rightful King from David's line will the obedience of the people be.

Jacob's blessing on Judah included more. He will be a successful farmer (vv.11-12). His posterity would produce lush, choice vines which throughout the Old Testament is a sign of God's blessing. They will be so wealthy that they will not mind if the donkey is tied to the vine and

eats it—which would happen without a doubt. Judah's line will be so wealthy that they will use wine for washing clothes, and they will be enviably healthy in appearance (v.12). Notice that Jacob had nothing negative to say about Judah.

Zebulun's people, according to Jacob, would dwell along the sea (v.13). That seems a bit odd because the Israelites were not particularly known as seafaring people. Nevertheless, the tribe of Zebulun came to border the Mediterranean Sea near Dor and south of Mt. Carmel. It is a bit difficult to see many safe harbors on their border. But it is very obvious that the people's allotted territory did border the Sidonians.

Issachar's posterity would become strong like a donkey (vv.14-15). That must mean that they would become hardworking people, which history indicates came to pass. According to Jacob, they would be a people who could rest from the burden at times. They would be people who could perceive the goodness of the land realizing that it was indeed fertile and good. But Issachar's people would never completely throw off the bondage of the Canaanites, and they would be the first to feel the bondage to Assyrian invaders in the 8th century.

Danites would be like a judge (vv.16-18). That is not so much a judge who makes ruling over others as it is a person who insists on justice. In that vein, the tribe of Dan was notorious for defending the nation of Israel. At times, the Danites were a strong and faithful group of people; but at other times, the people were failures as a tribe. An example of that is seen in the fact that Ohilibah, from the tribe of Dan, was in charge of building the temple; but Jereboam turned around years later and erected false worship in Dan.

The people would be strong on justice, but at the same time a serpent. Like a serpent, they deceived the people of Laish and attacked that peaceful city without provocation. They could not overpower the citizens in the land God had given them (particularly the Philistines), so they moved north and attacked the unsuspecting peaceful people. In their new location, Dan would be the door way to the nation. Everyone who attacked the nation of Israel came through Dan. Therefore, Jacob prayed for them. "*I wait for your salvation, O LORD*" (Genesis 49:18).

Gad would become another people group that was subject to attacks (v.19). Jacob promised that raiders would raid him. That was because the people were located on the other side of the Jordan River. If anyone attacked from the south or east, they would come through Gad.

But Gad's people would also raid the raiders as when the people helped settle Israel on the other side of Jordan.

Asher could grow into a tribe that would produce rich food (v.20). He would yield royal delicacies, that is, food fit for a king. But because of his location (northern frontier) the people often provided food for foreign kings who came through the Sidonians.

Naphtali would be a doe let loose (v.21). That's an odd picture. It speaks of being surefooted or, when applied to people, confident. It does seem like the people of Naphtali became somewhat independent people. Not only would they be confident people, but they would bear beautiful fawns. That is a very odd and hard to explain picture. Actually, the word translated *fawns* is always translated as *speech* or *words* in the Old Testament. It's hard to know what the translators of the ESV were thinking here. If we translate the word consistently ("words"), we discover that Jesus fulfilled this promise Himself. Matthew wrote, *And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles – the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned" (Matthew 4:13-16).*

Joseph, like Judah, received extensive promises (vv.22-26). He would be prosperous (v.22). As Jacob promised previously, Joseph's prophecy was fulfilled in his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. Especially the tribe of Ephraim manifested this prosperity. And it is also true that Joseph himself was bitterly attacked (v.23). This had already been the case as Joseph's own brothers had attacked him. Their harassment followed him all the way to slavery and prison in Egypt. Though the brothers attacked, God was sure to protect him (v.24). He did not falter throughout the ordeal and actually became stronger. This was God's work in Joseph. In the end, God blessed Joseph with great bounty (vv.25-26). Here we find a list of over-flowing blessings. All of it was from the hand of "the God of your father," the "Almighty" Jacob said.

Finally, there was the youngest son, Benjamin (v.27). Jacob promised that his posterity would grow up to be a ravenous wolf. That is definitely a negative picture, a dismal portrayal of Benjamin, if you are the wolf's prey. However, it is a very positive picture of Benjamin if you are part of the wolf's lair. If you belong to the wolf or are friends

of the wolf, you think it is a good idea that he was devouring and dividing prey. It is true that Benjamin's people came to be the smallest of the tribes. And yet, no tribe produced more fierce warriors than Benjamin. They were indeed like a ravenous wolf. It is certainly true that this tribe proved to be the symbol of Jacob's power which is the reason Jacob gave Benjamin that name (Gen. 35:18).

In recent years, a television show that followed a large Christian family became popular in some circles. I think the family had a dozen or so children. The parents affirmed that in spite of the fact that all the children were born to the same parents and lived in the same household, they each had unique personalities and character traits. So it was in our home with a small family of three sons. They are similar but each of them is unique. That is the picture before us in Jacob's blessing (or not) of his sons. And yet in these words, we see the hand of God moving, shaping, preparing each son to fulfill a particular aspect of His plans and purposes. Surely, when he was younger, Jacob never dreamed that God would be so involved in his family. Do we understand that God has a plan for our children?

Maybe at this point at the end of his life, Jacob's theme song became "Carry me back to old Machpelah" (vv.28-33). He requested that his sons would bury him in the promised land (vv.28-32). He wanted to be buried in the "tomb" that his grandfather had purchased from Ephron the Hittite (v.29). It was in the field at Machpelah, east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan which happened to be smack in the middle of the land God promised to give to Abraham, repeated the promise to Isaac, and repeated the promise to Jacob (v.30). Jacob firmly trusted God to keep His promise.

In the end, Jacob was gathered to his people (v.33). He willingly drew up his feet into the bed, submitting to the time of his death. If at no other time, every man, woman, or child will submit to God's will at death. God gathered him to where his relatives were. Where were Abraham and Isaac? Rotting in the tomb? Only their bodies were. Jesus told a story that reveals where Jacob's fathers were. He said, *The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side (Luke 16:22-23).* Jacob did not plan to go simply to "death" or "Sheol" but into the presence of God. He planned with confidence because God is faithful to His promises.

As God tarries to bring about the end of the age, we all will die and be gathered somewhere. Will our lives end as Jacob's did, with us expressing full confidence in God's promises? We are so much like Jacob in our need to grow and mature in our faith in God's promises. Often God must drag us through the fires of adversity, loss, and pain in order to be purified in our faith. Let's hasten to the point of being "equipped for every good work" as God gives us wisdom in the trial (James 1:2-8).