

**DHW**

**LESSON 37**

**THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

**CHAPTERS 48 & 49**

***INTRODUCTION***

Jacob had confessed to Pharaoh that the days of his life were *few and evil*. But by the grace of God, he lived another seventeen years in Egypt with Joseph, his favourite son, whom for twenty-two mournful years he believed was killed by a wild beast, but now alive. Those seventeen years must have been wonderful years indeed. Sensing that the time of his death was near, Jacob blessed his sons and uttered prophetic words of faith and hope before he breathed his last breath. We observe that there was not a word of complaint against God. In fact, he trusted God even more firmly and deeply.

When Jacob blessed his sons just before his death, he also sketched the salient outlines of

their future history. His last words concerning the character and the continuing development of God's promises to Israel through his twelve sons are full of prophetic significance. Each prophecy was based on Jacob's clear perception of the present character and individual traits of his sons. Upon this perception, the Holy Spirit supernaturally caused Jacob to prophesy the future history of the twelve tribes, which became the nucleus of the nation Israel.

The outline of the two chapters is as follows:

- 1) Jacob raised Joseph's two sons to the status of his sons (49: 1-7);
- 2) Jacob exalted Ephraim over Manasseh (48:8-22);
- 3) Jacob pronounced his blessings to his twelve sons (49:1-27);
- 4) Jacob instructed his sons to bury him in Canaan, where Abraham and Isaac were buried (49:28-50)

## ***STUDY THE WORD***

### **Jacob Raises the Status of Joseph's Two Sons**

On hearing that Jacob, his father was sick, Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to him. Jacob, who was partly blind, was told that Joseph had come to visit him. Jacob pulled himself together as much strength as he could muster to sit up. Jacob shared with Joseph that *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) had appeared to him in Luz (original name of Bethel) and blessed him.<sup>1</sup> His use of *El Shaddai* was significant for he was underscoring the sovereign power of the Almighty God - *the earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein* (Psalm 24:1).

He rehearsed God's covenant-promises with him by highlighting four things. God would make him fruitful; God would multiply his posterity; God would make him a great nation, and God would give the land of Canaan to his descendants as an everlasting piece

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<sup>1</sup> **Genesis 28:19** *And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. {Bethel: that is, The house of God}*

of real estate (48:4). He ended his sharing with Joseph by praising God, who had given him the joy of seeing not only Joseph but also the latter's children (48:11). Jacob's faith was strengthened by his recounting of God's covenant-promises. He was comforted and encouraged by God's words. His faith and hope in God were reflected in his words to Joseph that after his death, God would be with Joseph and would bring his children back to *the land of your fathers* (48:21). Jacob concluded his blessing upon Joseph by assuring him that he had given him a double-portion of his inheritance above his brethren (Genesis 48:22).

### **Jacob Chooses Ephraim over Manasseh**

Jacob imparted to Joseph a double portion of inheritance to his favourite son Joseph, who was the firstborn of Rachel, his favourite wife. Jacob gave the double portion of inheritance to Joseph in the form of raising his two grandsons (who were half Egyptians) to the status of his sons, and giving each of them an equal share of the inheritance. Hence these two sons became direct heirs.

Manasseh and Ephraim displaced Reuben and Simeon.<sup>2</sup> Jacob's kiss and embrace of the two boys were demonstration of the adoption process. Joseph then removed the boys from between Jacob's knees, and bowed *with his face to the earth* (Genesis 48:10, 12). This adoption reflects Jacob's reception of spiritual illumination concerning God's purpose (1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

When Jacob knew that Joseph's sons were present, he expressed his wish to bless them. Instead of placing his right hand on Manasseh, the elder, and the left hand on Ephraim, Jacob criss-crossed his hands so that his right hand was on Ephraim. Incidentally, this is the first mention of the laying of hands as a symbol of blessing.<sup>3</sup> Joseph was not pleased

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<sup>2</sup> **1 Chronicles 5:1** *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. <sup>2</sup> For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)* {chief...: or, prince}

<sup>3</sup> A similar procedure was used to dedicate priests:

Numbers 27:18 *And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun,*

and tried to remove his father's right hand to place it on Manasseh's head. But Jacob refused and said (Genesis 48:19) - *I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations* Jacob was aware of what he was doing. Jacob had walked before God for many years, and had attained the spiritual maturity to discern the will and ways of God. In later years history testifies that Ephraim

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*a man in whom is the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;*

Numbers 27:23 *And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.*

Deuteronomy 34:9 *And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.*

In the New Testament church officers were ordained by the laying of hands too:

Acts 6:6 *Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.*

Acts 8:17 *Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

1 Timothy 4:14 *Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.*

2 Timothy 1:6 *Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.*

became one of the largest tribes of Israel and assumed a leadership role in the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom.

### **Jacob Blesses His Twelve Sons**

There is an element of predictive prophecy in Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons. Jacob used the phrase *in the last days* (49:1). This refers to an undetermined time in the future. It could be early or late.<sup>4</sup> Jacob's

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<sup>4</sup> Compare the use of the expression in the following passages:

Daniel 2:28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; 29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.

Daniel 2:45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream *is* certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Ezekiel 38:16 And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O God, before their eyes.

prophecy intimated his faith. Under divine inspiration, he looked ahead to the claiming of the Promised Land after his death, and beyond.

First, Jacob gave his blessings to Reuben. As the firstborn, he should have possessed the secret of Jacob's strength, pride, and power. His tribe should have been the leading tribe of Israel. It was his sexual sin with Bilhah, for which he showed no repentance that cost him his primogeniture birthright. Jacob described him as being *unstable as water*. The metaphorical expression describes one who is emotionally unstable and destructive. Reuben's descendants never rose up to prominence.

Next in line were Simeon and Levi. They were mentioned together because they had the same nature. Jacob did not forget their cruel and wicked deeds in organising the massacre of the Shechemites. They too lost the birthright because of their

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Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly.

lawlessness and violence. Jacob placed on record his own absolute separation from such a crime. He predicted that they would be divided and scattered in the nation of Israel. Simeon was dispersed and became the weakest tribe. Levi's curse was later changed to a means of blessing. At a later time, the sons of Levi gathered with Moses to crush a rebellion against God. For their loyalty, God gave the sons of Levi the privilege of leading the people to Him through the Levitical priesthood. The cities of refuge allotted to them which were scattered throughout the lands of the other tribes became their particular glory (Numbers 35:2). In the process, Levi's descendants did not have a portion of the land which the other tribes had.

Judah was next in line. His name means "praise" and his brothers would praise him. Admittedly, Judah had his faults. He suggested selling Joseph as a slave into Egypt, but we know that his suggestion was a compromise to save Joseph's life. He broke his promise to Tamar and unknowingly committed sexual sin with her.

However, when faced with the evidence, his acknowledgment signalled his true repentance.

Judah had many exemplary traits. He displayed leadership qualities, responsibility and strength of character. He persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go down to Egypt by standing surety for him. In Egypt, he offered his own life in order that Benjamin might go free and his father be spared more sorrow.

Judah was blessed with power over his enemies and power of leadership over his brothers. His was the kingly line. History showed that out of Judah came the great and powerful kingdom under David, and the Greater Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, the King of kings! Judah was likened to a lion, which portrayed royal dignity and power. The lion symbolized power while the sceptre represented kingship. Jacob used metaphors to describe great abundance and wealth in his kingdom.

Zebulun was to have his territory in *the haven of the sea*. When the lands were allotted, Zebulun was sandwiched between

Asher at the Mediterranean coastline and Naphtali on the shore of Galilee. Zebulun benefited from the commerce, which flowed between the rich Galilean valley and the trading port of Asher.

Issachar would receive a fruitful land and would produce an abundance of food. Dan, the first-born son of Rachel's maid, Bilhah, would be a judge of *his people*. In Deuteronomy 33:7 *his people* refers to the whole nation, so Jacob was saying that the tribe of Dan would occupy an important judicial position in the future state of Israel. This was partially fulfilled when Israel was judged for twenty years by Samson, a Danite.<sup>5</sup>

The expression that Dan would be *an adder in the path* was fulfilled by the treacherous corruption of the worship of the LORD (Yahweh). The golden calf was set up in Dan's territory so that God's people would not go to His temple in Jerusalem.

Next, Gad's decision to live in the Transjordan exposed itself to

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<sup>5</sup> Judges 13:2 *And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.*

the constant threat of invasions. Its territory would be constantly attacked and harassed, but it would ultimately triumph.

Asher would occupy a fertile and highly productive land. This was fulfilled when Joshua gave that tribe the lowlands of Carmel, west to the Mediterranean and north to the territory of Tyre.

Naphtali would possess mountainous land and would display the gift of sophistication of speech. There is little subsequent data on Naphtali. This makes it difficult to determine the extent of the phrase, *he giveth goodly words*. However, Barak was from the tribe of Naphtali.

The imagery used by Jacob concerning Joseph suggests growth and prosperity. Benjamin was likened to the wolf because of his warlike character. At one point, this tribe in defence of its wickedness in Gibeah stood against all the others (Judges 20, 21). History confirmed this description.

### **Jacob Instructs His Sons Concerning His Burial Ground**

Jacob charged his children to bury his body in Machpelah, the cave which Abraham, his

grandfather bought for a burial place. Abraham and Sarah were buried there, so were Isaac and Rebekah, and his wife, Leah. His insistence that his body be interned in the Promised Land, Canaan, strongly suggests his abiding and unflinching faith and hope in God.

Jacob gave up his spirit and *was gathered unto his people*. He died at a good old age of one hundred and forty-seven!

### ***PRACTICAL VALUE***

The divine writer of the Book of Hebrews recorded *by faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped leaning upon the top of his staff* (Hebrews 11:21). We see that Jacob's faith in the LORD had grown from strength to strength at the end of his life. He assured Joseph that God would be with him and that He would bring him back to the Promised Land (Genesis 48:21-22; 49:29-32). When nearing the end of our life we should think of how we ought to bless and encourage our children.

Godly parents, who know the character and conduct of their children, and their propensity and

potentials better than any other persons should give sound and strong counsels to them before they are ushered into the presence of the LORD.

Jacob recalled the way God had dealt with him in the past. It is therefore important that we walk close to God and experience the wonderful ways He relates with us in the ups and downs of life. We shall therefore be able to share our experiences with our children, before we are about to be taken away to be absent in the flesh and be present before our LORD. As children we should expect our godly parents to give us their last words of counsel and blessing before they are taken away into the presence of the LORD. Their counsels from their death-bed will surely make a stronger impact on us and change our life for the better.

Our past failures and sin do affect our future blessings. We observe this truth in the lives of Reuben, Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:3-7). Reuben lost his firstborn blessings. Simeon should have stepped into Reuben's position. But he too lost this blessing because of his wicked deeds. Levi

fell in the same way. But later the sons of Levi were given a special blessing by God because they stood on the LORD'S side and faithfully committed themselves to the worship of the LORD their God. We see God forgave them when they repented and re-consecrated their lives to Him. However, they were not given land inheritance which was allotted to the other tribes.

In our sharing of the blessings we receive, we should seize the opportunity that arises to share our belief and conviction with others so that they might know that God is the true benefactor. Jacob shared the grace and blessings that God had shown and showered upon him. We should do likewise. AMEN