

Genesis 48

Read Genesis 48:1-7: Jacob (like all men) recalls the most important moments in his life on his death bed. Our *legacy* crystallizes as we get near the finish line. Elderly people in convalescent homes don't pine away about not having excelled more in their career. They do not lament over their unfinished *bucket list*. They regret estranged family members and hurtful things they have done to others.

Jacob was born with the DNA to strive and stretch to get things the way he wants them. He was born with talent, and he had an anointing on his life. Unfortunately, unbelievers fall to their weaknesses and believers fall to their strengths. We tend to commandeer things that we are gifted at. God frequently, has to teach those who are gifted that timing, and opportunity and desire can still leave you confounded. Jacob knew how to manipulate people and things to get closer to his goal. God had to show him that is not enough if you are not looking to God for direction.

God sent Laban into Jacob's life. The *wheeler-dealer* got *taken to the cleaners* over and over. The tough trader was out traded. God is patiently transforming Jacob by letting him see where these aspirations lead to. He was disenfranchised and disappointed. God is slowly opening Jacob's eyes to a higher calling. In fact, he has been re-named.

To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, ²⁶ to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd. (Psalm 18:26)

God is a master at using worldwide and local events as well as divine intervention to shape our lives. Jacob saw heavenly things twice, in the same place. When he was stressed and escaping to Padan Aram because of Esau's likely retaliation, he saw a stairway to heaven at Luz. Years later, on his way back to Canaan, he wrestled with God at Peniel; which is essentially in the same place. God says that by losing the wrestling match with God and becoming crippled he actually won with God. That sounds counter-intuitive, but we have to be brought to a place of voluntary surrender. That can take some doing for the determined and self-assured. In addition, getting answered prayers in *the heat of battle* is not always transformative. Jacob made vows; but that is not the same as a growing relationship with God. That kind of vow is almost more about personal pride in your own honor in keeping a promise. God has only been his *911 service*. For many, 911 calls and *laundry lists* are as far as the relationship with God goes. He is their *cosmic genie*; but he is not driving the bus.

Eventually, Jacob saw the value in honoring *his father's God*. That represents a little growth.

Next, Jacob had to see how *truly vulnerable* he is. This is why the beatitudes emphasize the ultimate blessing of lacking basic things in life. You do not need much convincing that you need God. All of the things in life that Jacob hoped in kind of fell through. I have seen that a person has to lose their options before they will raise *the white flag* and let God *call the shots* in their everyday life. I worked in the prayer and counseling ministry at church for a few years. I would pray with people who came forward at altar calls. For some, it was to receive Christ as their savior. For others it was in desperation for prayer needs. Every person who came forward was in the midst of a crisis. Not one person came forward who felt fine.

I like to quote the opening line from The Tale of Two Cities by Charles Dickens: *It was the best of times , and it was the worst of times*. Many of my friends (and myself) have gone through terrible circumstances that we hated. In retrospect, in many cases, those were times that were worth their weight in gold for causing us to transform substantially in our spiritual development. In fact, I like to encourage people to pay attention to what is really happening during tough times, and gain *the most yardage* spiritually as they can. We also must learn to be happy about the team *making a first down* when I fail. Can I be happy failing forward? Can I be happy if I get a kick in the shins in the process if others are ultimately blessed? My ability to minister to those in need has only come from personal failures. Never from successes. Sharing your failures is very disarming and compelling to others. Jacob's life was boiled down to one sentence before Pharaoh. He said that he fell short and his life has not been a good one. Any king can feel the gravity of this testimony as they interview an old man.

Being saved by faith in Christ is one thing; but dying to the self-life, needs to happen. It is like comparing an avocado seed to an avocado tree. They are both alive, but only one is living according to its potential. That seed needs a formal burial to get things going! That essentially is what baptism and circumcision represent.

It is amazing how hard we will hang on to our own pathetic *crumbling empires* before we are willing to take God's hand and step into his hundred-fold improved paradigm shift in our life. I have heard preachers describe how we are like people who have gotten used to some pretty ugly furniture. We are afraid to let go of our unhappy lives for whatever God has in mind. We are deathly afraid to put God in control. Once we do, we realize that we were absolute idiots to not do so previously. I also recall my mom being afraid to give God control over her life for decades; though she was always anxious and depressed. It was not until she was

on her death bed with hoses down her nose and throat feeling that she would never leave the hospital that she finally gave in. Today, she is living the best life she has ever had in her 90s!

Jacob is near death; and he is reflecting on God's promise. Like Abraham and Isaac, his descendants were prophesied to become numerous and inherit the land of Canaan. Jacob spends time reflecting on God's interventions and what his legacy is. He has been continuously disappointed with most of his sons. He only really wanted Rachel as his true wife; but somehow, he made use of concubines and an additional unintentional wife. Accordingly, there are hurtful and dysfunctional family factions and clannish behavior. What he really wants is for Rachel's sons to be the *flagships* of the family and be his main representation going forward. Jacob has shown favoritism and promotion to Joseph and Benjamin all along. It is almost like God's test to Jacob to take away his most cherished son, Joseph for so many years. Now, Jacob is taking one more stab at setting things in order.

Jacob finds a way to maximize the blessing allocated to the children of his true wife, Rachel. He essentially cuts in his grandchildren from Joseph in for a full portion of his children's inheritance. Since Joseph has two sons, he dilutes all of Joseph's brothers' shares. Ephraim and Manasseh would not otherwise be territories and tribes. It would have normally been just one tribal allocation to Joseph. Beyond that, Manasseh got two land allocations!

The tribe of Manasseh was unique among the Israelite tribes as it was divided into two separate areas:

1. **West Manasseh:** This portion was located west of the Jordan River, sharing borders with the tribes of Ephraim, Dan, and Benjamin.
2. **East Manasseh:** This section was situated east of the Jordan River and bordered the lands of Gad and Reuben.

Reason for the Division

The division of the tribe of Manasseh occurred for a few key reasons:

- **Large Population:** Manasseh was one of the larger tribes in terms of population, necessitating more land for their settlement.
- **Joseph's Blessing:** Manasseh was one of the two tribes descended from Joseph, along with Ephraim. This dual inheritance was in line with Joseph's status in Egypt, thus giving his descendants two sizable portions of land.
- **Geographical and Strategic Considerations:** The territory east of the Jordan River had fertile land suitable for agriculture and livestock, which was appealing for some families of Manasseh.

This division allowed for greater flexibility and resource management for the tribe overall, enabling them to thrive in both regions.

Read Genesis 48:8-22: Everything is now about God. Now, finally, his is the God of Israel too. The narrative switches calling him Jacob (heel grabber) and now refers to him as Israel (a prince with God). There is no more opportunity for pleasure in his life. Now he is very circumspect as he puts his stamp on the future. It is strange that Jacob had not yet seen Joseph's sons in Egypt yet.

Israel/ Jacob places a final blessing on his grandchildren from Joseph. He did not directly bless any other grandchildren. He bypasses the tradition of giving the oldest a double portion, family headship and to become the family spiritual priest. He gives that to the younger son, Ephraim. It reminds me of the nearly blind Isaac switching inheritance plans between Jacob and Esau. These things speak to God's sovereignty and divine intervention that transcends our protocols and ways of thinking.

It is interesting to note that Jacob closes this chapter by telling us that he took the land of the Amorites with his bow and arrow. These wars are recorded nowhere else in scripture that I am aware of.