

Genesis (2011) 48A

- We've been studying Genesis for roughly 30 months, and for almost half that time, we've been watching the life of Jacob
 - In fact, half of Genesis' 50 chapters involve Jacob one way or another
 - We've seen his shortcomings and failures
 - We've also noted his strengths and successes
 - We know him as a real person, as an authentic man called to follow God
 - He is flawed but growing under God's loving care
 - Clearly he's an important figure in this book and in God's plan for the world
 - In a sense, you could say that Jacob embodies God's response to Adam's sin
 - Adam's life began in perfect ease in the Garden, and ended in struggle and toil in the wilderness...
 - While Jacob's life began in struggle and toil, but it will culminate in peace and ease, living in the oasis of Goshen
 - And today we learn another reason Jacob is so unique in God's plan
 - Obviously, we already know his family becomes the nation of Israel, the center of God's plan of redemption
 - But Jacob is the last of the patriarchs
 - Today we say "Abraham, Isaac and Jacob..."
 - We never add another name after these three
 - Today we learn why
- So now the time has come to conclude Jacob's story
 - We have three chapters remaining
 - In these chapters we see several loose threads tied up
 - First, we watch how Jacob's life ends

- Secondly, we learn how the seed promise and birthright will move forward into the family of Israel
 - Thirdly, we see the end of Joseph's story, which is closely linked to Jacob
 - Finally, in all these things we come to appreciate the sovereignty of God at work to accomplish His purposes through this family
- Today we return to the end of Chapter 47, which together with the beginning of Chapter 48, forms one continuous scene
 - Israel and his children have settled in Goshen while Joseph remains installed in the government of Egypt

[Gen. 47:27](#) Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous.

[Gen. 47:28](#) Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years.

[Gen. 47:29](#) When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt,

[Gen. 47:30](#) but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."

[Gen. 47:31](#) He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

- After Jacob arrives in Egypt, he lives in Goshen another 17 years
 - The first 5 years or so were years of famine
 - Nevertheless, the family prospered in Goshen under Joseph's care
 - After the famine ends, Jacob lives another 12 years, one year for each of his sons
 - Jacob lives to 147 years old we're told, but he's not dead yet, so the next section describes the last days of his life
 - It begins with Jacob's insistence that Joseph swear an oath to him
 - The oath ritual is particular to this time and culture

- A man requested that another man place his hand in a certain place on his body
- Our English Bibles render the place as under the “thigh”
- In reality Jacob was asking Joseph to place his hand on Jacob’s most intimate body area, his genitals
- This act invoked powerful symbolism
 - This area of a man’s body represented life, given its role in bringing new life into the womb
 - Therefore, an oath taken in this way symbolized a promise taken on the life of the person
 - In this case, if Joseph failed to keep his word, then his own life and posterity would be cut off
- The promise Jacob demands of Joseph is that Jacob would never be buried in Egypt
 - Instead, Joseph would ensure that Jacob’s body would be preserved so it could be transported into Canaan and buried in the family’s traditional burial place, the cave of Machpelah
 - And Joseph swears to do as his father requests
- Pay attention to the order of Jacob’s words
 - Jacob said that after he is lying with the fathers, then his body is to be carried back to Canaan
 - We can see that Jacob did not consider “lying with the fathers” to mean the burial of his dead body in the grave
 - Jacob expected he would already be “with the fathers” even before his body reached Canaan and was buried in the cave
 - So Jacob’s instructions tell us he had faith in an afterlife, one that he would share with his fathers
 - He believes he will live on by God’s power, just as did Abraham and Isaac
 - Furthermore, Jacob’s desire to see his body return to Canaan is symbolic of his faith in God’s promise of resurrection

- We remember that the Lord appeared to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob with the same promise
 - And among other things, the Lord would grant them an inheritance in the land of Canaan
 - But none of these men received that promise in their lifetime
 - Abraham and Isaac died in the land having never received the full inheritance they were promised
 - Likewise, Jacob is preparing to die outside the land, knowing he has not received what God promised
- So how can God be faithful to His promises?
 - Why did these patriarchs trust in that promise even after they clearly saw their fathers dying without its fulfillment?
 - The answer is resurrection
 - These men had faith they would be resurrected into new bodies so they could receive what God has promised
 - They trusted that physical death was no barrier to God keeping His word...it merely delays the fulfillment until the appointed time
 - So they each asked to be buried in the land, as a testimony of their expectation to be living again one day in the land God promised
- Hebrews confirms that this is what the patriarchs believed

Heb. 11:13 All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Heb. 11:14 For those who say such things make it clear that they are seeking a country of their own.

Heb. 11:15 And indeed if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return.

Heb. 11:16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God; for He has prepared a city for them.

- The men and women of faith listed in Hebrews 11 demonstrated faith by their actions

- And in the case of the patriarchs, they demonstrated their faith by the way they lived and died in the land
- They lived as wanderers and died with expectations of resurrection
- I don't think there's a more succinct description of our calling as Christians in all the Bible
 - Like Jacob, we are to forsake any attachments to this world
 - Living with an ever-present expectation of our resurrected life in the Kingdom to come
 - Knowing that will be the day when we will see the fulfillment of God's promises
 - In that day we will receive a new glorified body free of pain and suffering
 - In that day, we receive an inheritance that can never be taken away from us
 - In that day, we enjoy life, and life abundantly
 - But for now, we live by faith and in the hope of these good things to come
 - Let's be careful to never want to trade our hope in resurrection for an attachment to this world
 - For example, don't be misled to think that the promises of God find their fulfillment in this world, in this sinful body
 - We will see evidence of God's grace in this life, certainly
 - This life is not absent God's blessings
 - But neither is it the fulfillment of them
 - In fact, Paul says the presence of God's Spirit living in us is only a downpayment on the inheritance we are to receive after our death

[Eph. 1:13](#) In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation – having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, [Eph. 1:14](#) who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.

- Paul says the gift of the Holy Spirit is a pledge, and that word in Greek means downpayment or earnest money
 - It's God's pledge to us that the work He began in us He will bring to completion one day
 - Therefore, our life today cannot be the full measure of God's grace
 - It's just the beginning
- So don't think this world must be the fullness of what God has promised
 - Despite what the book says, you will not see your best life now
 - Because for believers, this life is the least of your blessings when compared to the life awaiting you in the Kingdom
- If we begin to think God will deliver on His promises to us in this life, then we're likely to cling to the world, to become a friend with the world
 - But the only person who truly experiences his best life now is the one who remains an unbeliever
 - And it's no life at all
- Jacob is demonstrating that same faith here, and in doing so he becomes our model
 - In fact, Hebrews specifically credits him with faith in this moment

[Heb. 11:21](#) By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.

- Notice it says that as Jacob was dying, he was worshipping while leaning on his staff
- That odd detail in Hebrews was the writer's subtle way of drawing our attention back to this moment in Genesis 47 and 48
- How does Hebrews 11 connect with what we're studying in Genesis 47?
 - Well in v.31 it says that Israel bowed and worshipped at the head of his bed
 - But this is actually not a good translation
 - The word in Hebrew for bed is *mittah*

- That word is almost identical in Hebrew to the word *mattah*, which means staff
- If we consult the Septuagint, the Jews' own translation of their scriptures into Greek, we find the verse translated this way

[Gen. 47:31](#) And he said, Swear to me; and he swore to him. And Israel did reverence, leaning on the top of his staff.

- It's likely that a copyist error created the confusion, when the original meaning was *mattah*, or staff
- So the writer of Hebrews uses the phrase "worshipping on his staff" to draw a connection to this moment in Jacob's life
 - The moment when he told Joseph to return his body to Canaan
 - The writer of Hebrews teaches us that this request is evidence of Jacob's faith in God's promises
 - Jacob was so sure of God's faithfulness, that he didn't want to be caught buried in the wrong place when his resurrection took place
- The write of Hebrews also mentioned this event happened in conjunction with Jacob blessing Joseph's sons, which leads us into Chapter 48

[Gen. 48:1](#) Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is sick." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him.

[Gen. 48:2](#) When it was told to Jacob, "Behold, your son Joseph has come to you," Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed.

[Gen. 48:3](#) Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,

[Gen. 48:4](#) and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.'

[Gen. 48:5](#) "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.

[Gen. 48:6](#) "But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance.

[Gen. 48:7](#) "Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

- Since Jacob is near death, it's time for him to transfer the birthright to the next generation
 - Remember, every father had an inheritance to pass along to his children
 - The inheritance included all the property the father had acquired
 - The inheritance was divided according to the patriarch's wishes, usually among all the sons
 - When it came time to assign the inheritance, usually at the moment the current patriarch was dying, one of the sons was assigned the birthright
 - The birthright usually belonged to the oldest son
 - It entitled him to receive a double portion of the inheritance and the right to become the new patriarch
 - The double portion was calculated by dividing the estate into a number of portions equal to the number of sons plus one
 - So in Jacob's household, there were twelve sons
 - Therefore, Jacob will divide his estate into thirteen equal portions
 - And one son will get two portions and the right to become patriarch
- Now in the case of the family of Jacob, the inheritance included a unique additional element
 - It included the seed promise, which was the promise the Lord delivered to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
 - This promise was something God said would be passed down within the family, as part of their inheritance
 - The promise represented a special inheritance that God established and assigned to this family
 - Therefore, God elected who would receive it in each generation
 - Though the patriarch conferred the birthright, it was God Who determined where it would rest within the family
 - This unique partnership has led to some interesting and even comical situations in this family

- As when Jacob and Esau bargained over the birthright
- Or when Judah's daughter-in-law Tamar birthed twins
- So at this point, Jacob is preparing to pass on the birthright, and our favorite question returns: who will receive the inheritance?
 - Jacob begins by calling Joseph and his sons into his presence
 - He recounts the inheritance he has been given by God, which he is prepared to pass down to the next generation
 - The promise of God included the blessing of many children and a company or tribe of many peoples
 - It included a land that Israel would one day own in peace as an everlasting possession
 - And it included the arrival of the Messiah, the Seed to rescue God's people from sin
- In past generations, the Lord made clear how the transfer would take place
 - When it came time to pass the inheritance to the next son, everything would transfer to one person
 - In the case of Abraham, both the birthright and the seed promise were given to Isaac
 - While Ishmael received nothing
 - In the case of Isaac, both the birthright and the seed promise were given to Jacob
 - Esau received nothing
 - So now the question becomes how will God accommodate all of Jacob's sons?
 - Will God's blessing and promise transfer from Jacob to one tribe thereby leaving the other tribes outside His promises?
 - Here we get part of the answer
 - Jacob has determined to give the double portion to Joseph, meaning Joseph receives the birthright
 - Except that Jacob is doing it in a very unique and important way

- He grants an equal portion to each of Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh
- He does this by legally adopting Joseph's sons
- Notice in v.5 Jacob declares that Joseph's sons were now Jacob's sons
 - Just as much as Reuben and Simeon
 - Remember, Reuben and Simeon were #1 and #2 sons of Leah
 - Therefore, Jacob is calling Joseph's sons in effect the #1 and #2 sons of Rachel
- We see further evidence in v.8, where Jacob makes a reference back to Rachel's death
 - Rachel died on a road leading into Canaan while giving birth to Benjamin
 - Jacob always felt she died too soon, denying him more years together and perhaps more sons
 - So now he is adopting two of Rachel's grandsons in place of Joseph
 - In effect, Jacob now acquires a third son of Rachel he was denied by her untimely death
- How can we know this to be his intention?
 - Notice how Jacob emphasizes the name of the place they were going to at the time of her death, Ephrath, which today is Bethlehem
 - The word for Ephrath is of the same root in Hebrew as the name Ephraim
 - Jacob is saying that Ephraim is the fulfillment of what he expected to find entering the land with Rachel
 - By adopting Joseph's sons, Jacob essentially gives Joseph's tribe the double portion of the birthright
 - While every other brother will receive a single portion, Joseph's family receives the double portion
 - But in the way Jacob did it through the adoption of the two grandsons, neither grandson has the birthright by himself

- Each only received a single portion
 - Jacob's actions have the effect of preventing the birthright in the nation of Israel from ever transferring to a single person again
 - After Jacob, no one man holds the birthright
 - No tribe is greater than the others
 - The birthright of God's inheritance has been divided evenly among the tribes
 - Today the promises given to Abraham are shared among a nation of people rather than a single individual
 - This is why today we say that our salvation and the promises of God come through Israel the nation
 - Israel the man begot Israel the nation, and now it is through that nation that God brings the promise of salvation, realized in the Person of Christ
- Speaking of the Messiah, there is still the matter of which tribe receives the seed promise in God's inheritance, since only one tribe can bring forth a Messiah
 - And as we'll see later in Chapter 49, Judah is given that privilege
 - But for now, we discover that Joseph is the last man to carry the birthright in Israel
 - As 1 Chronicles explains:

[1Chr. 5:1](#) Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright.

[1Chr. 5:2](#) Though Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came the leader, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph),

- So the inheritance God granted to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is now distributed evenly among Jacob's descendants
 - While we see Jacob making this decision, we're reminded once again by the letter to the Hebrews that this decision was an act of faith prompted by the Spirit of God

- In fact, v.2 in my English translation says that Jacob sat upon his bed
 - But once again, that word should be translated leaning on his staff
 - So this is the same moment Hebrews described in Chapter 11, where it told us this blessing was an act of faith on Jacob's part
 - This is evidence that God Himself is directing this patriarch to adopt these sons
- In the way the Lord directs this outcome, He creates in Joseph's life yet another powerful picture of Christ
 - First, notice what Jacob says in vs.6
 - Jacob stipulates that if Joseph should have any other children after this moment, then those children would not be considered Jacob's family
 - In other words, Joseph's tribe will continue only through Ephraim and Manasseh
 - Any other children birthed by Joseph's wife would be considered Egyptian, since Joseph was now technically an Egyptian citizen
 - Furthermore, Jacob says that any inheritance Joseph passes on from his life in Egypt would go to his Egyptian children
 - Clearly, Jacob doesn't want any of his inheritance to be shared with the Egyptians
 - The only way to ensure that outcome was to take Joseph's sons into his own family, removing them from the family of Joseph and Egypt
 - Joseph's sons were adopted by his father so that they might receive Joseph's inheritance
 - And so it is with us and Christ
 - The Bible teaches that we were once children of the world, just as Joseph's sons were technically sons of Egypt
 - And then the Father in Heaven adopted us, making us sons of God

- And because we are adopted sons of God, we now have the promise of receiving Christ's inheritance

[Eph. 1:5](#) He [the Father] predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,

[Eph. 1:6](#) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

[Eph. 1:10](#) ...In Him [the Father]

[Eph. 1:11](#) also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,

- What Jacob did for Joseph's sons, the Father has done for all of us
 - Joseph's faithfulness and Joseph's obedience made possible his sons' opportunity to be blessed by Joseph's father
 - Because Jacob loved Joseph and he honored Joseph with the birthright
 - But the enjoyment of that birthright fell not to Joseph but to his sons, not because his sons earned it, but because Jacob was seeking to honor his son Joseph
 - And Jesus' faithfulness and obedience to the Father made possible our blessing as adopted sons of God
 - We will enjoy the inheritance the Father has prepared for Christ
 - Not because we earned it, but because the Father selected us to receive it
- Next week, we see evidence of God's sovereignty at work as Joseph tried to direct his father to grant his greater blessing to Joseph's older son over the younger
 - And I'll give you one guess how it turns out