

## Passing the Baton Genesis 48:1-22

Kent Hughes writes: “His eye of faith saw his people as one day returning to Canaan.”

The holidays are around the corner and there has been considerable discussion about how family gatherings will be different this year with the ongoing battle of the COVID virus. As people are interviewed, polls indicate that many are opting to forego time with extended family and friends. People just aren't sure so they want to risk exposure to the virus and illness. I get it.

Many of you know that this has been a challenging year health wise for my Dad. We're not going to throw caution to the wind, but we are planning a Thanksgiving gathering and we'll be cautious. Barring another executive order we are going, because at his age and with his health concerns we don't know when that call will come from my brother that has joined the heavenly choir.

When I look back, I'm glad I took that Monday 10 years ago to head north and be with my Mom for a few hours while she was put on hospice. She was lucid and we had a good visit. But that Wednesday we got the call that things had turned for the worse and we drove up to be with her as she passed on to glory early the next morning. Turns out that Monday was the last time I spoke with her.

I know how Joseph felt, and probably so can most of you, when he got the call that his father was sick. It wasn't just the sniffles or bout of the flu. We read about their visit in **Genesis 48** where we turn our attention this morning. Some who are near death know it and have a sense of clarity. Jacob did.

Edmund Waller put it in perspective with these words:

*The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Let's in new light through chinks time has made.*

In other words, the many trials we encounter that buffet the soul offers insight at the end when life's lessons are pondered. For Jacob it was a reflection on his walk of faith. His faith had given Him a clear vision of what God had intended to be for the future of his descendants.

With a keen mental eye, he recalled the promises of God made to him over half a century earlier. He was still acting in faith and **Hebrew's 11:21** describes his faith as worship. His faith takes center stage in this chapter as he reflects on his walk with God and reminds his son to do the same. It's a wonderful account as we read about Jacob's admission, Jacob's action, and Jacob's affirmation.

Let's consider first Jacob's admission.

### I. JACOB'S ADMISSION – vs. 1-4

We discover from **verse 1** that this event happens sometime after Jacob's request to Joseph that he be buried back in Canaan. We noted that this request was an act of faith in God in whom he believed would keep His Word regarding the promise made to give his descendants the land of Canaan as an inheritance. Days, weeks, months, we aren't told but time has lapsed. and Jacob's health has gotten worse. Word reached Joseph who immediately had his chariot readied so he and his two sons could pay a visit. When they arrived Jacob was told that his son was there and so Jacob gathered his strength and sat up in bed. The term literally means that it took great effort to sit up. He needed his strength because there were some things he wanted to convey to his son that involved his two sons.

In reading this chapter I want you to notice something that is absent. Seventeen years earlier when Jacob entered Egypt and stood before Pharaoh, he was asked how old he was. Jacob said he was 130 years old, but his life had been filled with hardship. Maybe he was the first one to sing the song that appeared on the Hee-Haw show – “Gloom, despair, and agony on me. Deep, dark depression, excessive misery. If it weren't for bad luck, I'd have no luck at all. Gloom, despair, and agony on me.”

But all that is absent here as he recounts to Joseph how God has acted on his behalf. He has come to realize that all his hardships was the anvil of faith

on which God used to hammer his servant into a man who learned to trust, that **“all things work together for good, to them who love God to them who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28)**. God had a plan for Jacob and through the hardships sharpened his faith. This chapter is all about God as Jacob reflects on how God has been with him throughout his life.

Notice in **verse 3** Jacob’s admission about God’s power.

### **A. Jacob’s Admission About God’s Power – v. 3**

He begins by referring to the one he trusted as **“God Almighty”**. It’s the name Jacob uses to speak of the One who had led him all these years. As the Almighty He is the Omnipotent one, the all-powerful, the one for whom nothing is impossible. In **Genesis 1** His spoken word had the power to create all things out of nothing.

In **Genesis 7** His power unleashed a global flood destroying everything except for those in the ark.

In **Genesis 19** His power rained down fire and brimstone to consume Sodom and Gomorrah.

In **Genesis 21** His power brought about the miraculous conception of Isaac to two old parents past the years of bearing a child.

Here are a few verses that speak of God’s Almighty power.

**I Chronicles 29:11-12 “Yours, O Lord is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is Yours. Yours, O Lord, is the kingdom; You are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from You; You are the ruler of all things. In Your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give You thanks, and praise Your glorious name.”**

**Jeremiah 32:27 “Behold, I am the Lord, the God of all flesh: is there any thing too hard for me?”**

**Psalms 91:1-2 “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty; I will say of the Lord, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I**

**trust.’”**

**Revelation 1:8 “‘I am the Alpha and the Omega,’ says the Lord God, ‘who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty.’”**

**Jeremiah 32:17 “Ah. Sovereign Lord, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and outstretched arm. Nothing is too hard for You.”**

**Romans 8:38-39 “For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

**Revelation 4:8 “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come.”**

How appropriate are the lyrics to a Mighty Fortress is Our God.

**A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing.**

Looking back over his 147 years Jacob had become convinced that God was Almighty and he conveyed that to his son in the name by which he chose to address God.

**Are you convinced of God’s omnipotence?  
Have you seen the evidence of His power?  
Can you call Him the Almighty God?**

Jacob was convinced. God Almighty was as much a name to him as it was a confession about Him. Jacob had an admission about God’s power. Next, Jacob had an admission about God’s presence.

### **B. Jacob’s Admission About God’s Presence – v. 3**

**“God Almighty appeared to me at Luz.”**

We read about Luz back in **28:19**. Jacob was fleeing for his life from brother Esau, after deceiving him by getting the blessing from their father, Isaac. He

stopped for the night at Luz where God met him in a dream. He saw that ladder where angels were coming and going with God standing at the top. It spoke of God's ever abiding presence with Jacob no matter where he was. In the morning he renamed the place Bethel, which means house of God. He made a vow that morning that if God would be with him, watch over him, provide for him throughout his journey and bring him back to that place, then the Lord would be his God. He then set up a stone to commemorate the vow and poured oil on it as a symbol of his commitment.

God then met Jacob a second time at Bethel when he was returning to Canaan from Paddan-Aram. He reaffirmed His promise regarding the descendants of Jacob who would inherit the Promised Land.

God was and always would be with Jacob, even when he wasn't aware of His presence, even when he was deceived and taken advantage of, even when there were times of uncertainty and fear like when he returned to Canaan and met Esau.

Forgive me if you think I'm plucking the same string and singing the same song here, but we have the assurance from God's Word of His ever-abiding presence. Jacob had that assurance in **28:15** **"I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."**

**Psalm 139:2-3, 7-9**

**Jeremiah 23:24**

**How often do I forget that God will never leave or forsake me as He has promised?**

This past week I needed that reminder. Feeling overwhelmed with life stuff God Almighty showed up in the form of an encouraging card. It was a simple but beautiful card with a note of appreciation, stuffed in an envelope with a 55-cent stamp. The couple who sent it didn't know that it had been a particularly challenging time or that it was what I needed most when I got home Wednesday night. While it was a note of gratitude, it was a reminder of God's ever abiding presence as

God Almighty who will never abandon me. He will never sound retreat. He will never be overpowered. The same God Almighty who is on the mountain tops with us is also in the valleys as well.

**I have shared the words of Betsy ten Boom before but they bear repeating: "there is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still."**

Jacob knew of God's abiding presence. Let his admission about God's presence encourage you today.

The third thing we see in this verse is Jacob's admission about God's promise.

### **C. Jacob's Admission About God's Promise – vs. 3-4**

God has never made a promise He can't keep.  
God has never made a promise He won't keep.  
God has never made a promise He doesn't intend to keep.

**Jeremiah 10:10 "But the Lord is the true God; He is the living God and the everlasting King."**

**Psalm 31:5 "Into Your hand I commit my spirit; redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth."**

**Hebrews 6:18 "God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope offered to us may be greatly encouraged."**

**Numbers 23:19 "God is not a man, that He should lie, nor a son of man, that He should change His mind. Does He speak and then not act? Does He promise and then not fulfill?"**

Don't be deceived as Eve was in the Garden of Eden when Satan made her question the truth of God's Word. When God speaks, His Word is true and trustworthy so that what He says He will do.

**Lamentations 3:23** reminds that God's faithfulness is great.

**I Corinthians 10:13 "...but God is faithful."**

**Deuteronomy 7:9 "Know therefore that the Lord your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love**

**him and keep His commandments, to a thousand generations.”**

**II Timothy 2:13 “If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.”**

**Psalms 33:4 “For the Word of the Lord is upright, and all His work is done in faithfulness.”**

**II Thessalonians 3:3 “The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.”**

**Hebrews 10:23 “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.”**

Jacob was recounting to Joseph God’s faithfulness to keep His Word regarding the promises He made. His descendants would increase.

His descendants would be given the land of Canaan as an eternal inheritance.

Jacob could attest to the promises of God. He heard about the promises made to his grandfather, Abraham and to his father Isaac and heard them from God Himself. God’s Word is true and He will keep His promises. He spoke of God and what He had done for him. That’s Jacob’s admission.

Next, we see Jacob’s action.

## **II. JACOB’S ACTION – vs. 5-20**

The first action is his adoption.

### **A. Jacob’s Adoption – vs. 5-11**

Let’s remember a few things. The first is that as the patriarch or heir of the promise, the inheritance was his to give to whom he wanted.

The second is that Reuben, his first born by Leah, had forfeited the right of inheritance because of his weak character and his incestuous relationship with Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid given as a wife to Jacob. His moral lapse removed him from the birthright.

Third, Jacob’s original intent was to marry Rachel, but through Laban’s deceitfulness, married Leah

first. Because Rachel was to have been his first wife, Joseph would have been the firstborn.

Consequently, Joseph was given the right as first born to receive the double portion. Through his two sons, Joseph received two shares in the Promised Land because Jacob adopted them as his own. We read in **verse 5** that they would become his sons, just as Reuben and Simeon were his sons. It was like they had been born to him. Though Manasseh was first born, Ephraim is mentioned first because Jacob’s intent, as we will see in a moment, was to give Ephraim preference over his older brother. But as adopted sons, they would enjoy equal treatment in the Promised Land. In fact, in time they would supersede Reuben and Simeon.

The tribe of Ephraim would be the location of the Tabernacle set up in Shiloh after the nation became established in the land and before Jerusalem became the capital.

After the northern tribes seceded from the nation, it became the prominent tribe. Sometimes the northern kingdom was referred to as Ephraim. Their first king, Jeroboam was from the tribe of Ephraim.

Any additional children Joseph might have would belong to him and would be given territory under the two brothers who had been adopted by their grandfather, Jacob.

Because of his failing health and poor eyesight, Jacob knew someone was with Joseph but couldn’t see them. Joseph informed his father that it was his two sons. Jacob’s intent was to bless them. Through their adoption we see Jacob’s faith in God.

The second action Jacob did was his advisement.

### **B. Jacob’s Advisement – vs. 12-20**

Joseph positioned his sons so that Manasseh was at his grandfather’s right hand as the oldest with Ephraim on his left as the younger. But Jacob switched it up and placed his right hand on Ephraim indicating that he would receive the greater blessing, while Manasseh would get the lesser blessing. In essence, the right of the firstborn was

passed on to Ephraim. And Jacob blessed them.

Notice the blessing, which has application for us. Jacob spoke about walking with God, that God shepherds His people and that He delivers them.

We see His steps.

We see He shepherds.

We see He saves.

There is a familiar passage where we see these three same traits of God.

### **Psalm 23:1-6**

I'm not going to go through this whole Psalm but only remind you of the truth that relates to our passage. This Psalm is such a wonderful reminder that God walks with us, that God shepherds us, and that God redeems us.

We know that as our Shepherd, the Lord has our best interest at heart. In time Jacob had come to understand that about God. When we trust the shepherd, there isn't anything that we lack because He provides for our needs. He gives us comfort in times of sorrow, nourishment and strength for life's journey. When necessary, He removes the obstacles we sometimes come up against. He knows exactly what we need when we need it. The sheep know they can trust Him.

Even when we walk through dark days along the journey of life, the Lord our shepherd is with us so that we have nothing to fear for because we are with Him. The closer we are to the shepherd, the greater our sense of peace even in the middle of trouble. Jacob had learned that God was with him along his journey. He had learned not to fear evil. He learned that God gives comfort.

Throughout Scripture we see that God walks with us and His way is always the best.

**Proverbs 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight."**

On the other hand, we read in **Proverbs 2:15** that those who choose not to walk with God walk crooked paths.

**Psalm 23** tells us that God shepherds us and walks with us and then we also see in **verse 6** that God delivers us, He redeems us, He saves us. When we trust the shepherd and follow Him, He leads us to a place where we will be with Him forever.

Jacob's father and grandfather knew what it was for God to walk with them. He had come to a place of trusting God as his shepherd, the One who had delivered him from evil.

**Does He walk with you?**

**Is He your shepherd?**

**Has He delivered you?**

When Joseph saw that his father's hands were not in the right position he tried to correct his father. It says he was displeased. That's the only time recorded for us of something negative about Joseph. He wasn't happy about it. He thought Manasseh as firstborn should get the firstborn blessing. Joseph may have been upset, but Jacob was following the leading of God in the matter. Jacob knew what he was doing. **John Phillips says, "It was not personal preference but prophetic pronouncement."**

There is Jacob's admission and Jacob's action. In the remaining verses we see Jacob's affirmation.

### **III. JACOB'S AFFIRMATION – vs. 21-22**

When Abraham was about to die, he called his servant and sent him on an errand to find a wife for his son, Isaac.

When Isaac was about to die, he called for his favorite son to hunt and fix his favorite game, so that he might bless him. But Esau was not God's choice to receive the covenant blessing.

When Jacob was about to die, he sent for Joseph so that he might bestow his blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh and adopt them as his own.

Let me just say that when we have reached the end of our lives it's good to know that we have completed what God has asked of us.

**II Timothy 4:7 "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." The Phillips Translation: "The glorious fight**

**that God gave me I have fought. The course that I was set I have finished, and I have kept the faith.”**

**How well are we running the race God has given us?**

**Are we on course to finish the work God has for us to do?**

I just ordered a book I'm anxious to read. It's titled Zeal Without Burnout: Seven Keys to a Lifelong Ministry of Sustainable Sacrifice. Here's the synopsis of the book written by a pastor for pastors, but is applicable to any Christian.

**“Thousands of people leave Christian ministry every month. They have not lost their love for Christ, or their desire to serve him. But for one reason or another, they are exhausted and simply cannot carry on.”**

**How is your service for the Lord?**

**Are you feeling burned out or used up?**

**Are you finishing the word God gave you to do?**

We don't need to burn out, but neither are we to rust out. Take Paul's admonishment to heart.

Fight the good fight, in the power God gives you.

Finish the race He has put you on.

Keep the faith.

Once again, the man who has learned to walk by faith and who will one day be added to the hall of faith in **Hebrews 11** reminds of God's presence and God's promises. They are good for us to remember. God will be with you.

God will bring you to His promised land.

Telling Joseph that God would be with him sounds a bit like preaching to the choir. Of all people, Joseph knew that God was with him. But I think Jacob wanted his son never to forget that. It can be easy to forget when things are going really well. In that instance we might very well tell God He can take it easy because we have this. He can go and help some other poor soul, we can handle it from here. Maybe Jacob didn't want Joseph to get too comfortable in his role and forget God.

Not only did he tell Joseph to remember God would be with him but that God would take him back to

Canaan. Jacob was again acting in faith. And in a final gesture, Jacob promised his son a plot of ground in Canaan. Four hundred years later when the people of Israel marched out of Egypt settled in Promised Land, Joseph was buried in the place his father promised. We learn from **Joshua 24:32** that it was land purchased from Shechem.

Jacob admitted God's power, presence and promise. We see his actions through adoption and advisement.

He then affirmed God's presence and promise.

Jacob has had a remarkable journey and he is a testimony of someone who is finishing well. He started out as a scoundrel, a deceiver and God molded him into a man of faith through whom the nation of Israel would grow. A relay race is often won or lost in the baton exchange. Jacob is passing on the baton of God's presence and promise to his son. I'm almost certain that Joseph had seen the kind of man his father was, but I'm convinced he saw a great change in the man his father had become.

Something you have heard me say from time to time bears repeating. **“I'm not what I was and neither am I yet what I'm going to be.”** It's from **I John 3:2-3** **“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”**

It's a journey of faith, trusting in God with all our heart rather than following our own predilection, our own understanding.

You have also heard me say that we may not know the path that God is taking us on, but when we follow the one who is leading the way there is nothing to fear. God will be with you and your reward for faith is that He will take you to His promised land, and we will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.