

### Jacob confirmed his faith in God's promises

- Beyond his death

- We too should give thought to ways of affecting later generations

- Serving God in extreme old age

### Jacob took steps to see that the promises of God were inherited by his children and grandchildren

- Passes the promise to his twelve sons

- Special honour to Rachel through her sons

### Jacob blesses the boys in a way that underlines the fact that God often chooses the unexpected person

**Jacob expressed his faith that the purpose of God would continue after his death.** He lived to a great old age<sup>□1</sup> and when he knew he would die he expressed his certainty that God's promises would be fulfilled. He was confident that his descendants would go back to Canaan and he wanted to express publicly his faith that the future of God's people lay in Canaan. He wanted to be buried in Canaan as an expression of the fact that he was sure that it was there that God would work to bring blessing to the entire world<sup>□2</sup>. 'Israel' bowed in worship 'at the head of his bed' or 'on his staff'<sup>□3</sup>.<sup>1</sup>

Few Christians give much thought to the impact they will have after they have gone home to heaven. Yet men and women of faith should be like Abel who 'still speaks, even though he is dead'<sup>□1</sup>. Jacob's demand to be buried in Canaan would speak to later generations of the fact that he was living in expectation that God's future was in despised Canaan, not in luxurious and powerful Egypt. We too should give thought to ways of affecting later generations.

It is also to be noticed that Jacob was determined to serve God even in extreme old age. If God allows us to live to be very elderly we shall find that there are ways of serving Him even when we are frail and worn.

**Jacob took steps to see that the promises of God were inherited by his children and grandchildren.** After the oath which Joseph took<sup>□1</sup> Jacob became ill and Joseph went to see him with his two sons<sup>□2</sup>. Jacob wished to pass on the family promises. When Jacob dies the responsibility of carrying on the promises of God will rest with Joseph and his brothers. Jacob reviews the promises. God had promised the family of Abraham that his seed would be numerous and would inherit the land of Canaan<sup>□3</sup>. That promise had been passed to Isaac and to Jacob. Now Jacob wishes to pass it on to his twelve sons. He also wishes to specially honour the memory of Rachel his much-loved wife. Joseph was her son and Ephraim and Manasseh were her grandsons although she never saw them. Jacob makes a special arrangement. He adopts his two grandsons (Ephraim and Manasseh) as his own sons<sup>□4</sup>. Verse 7 gives his reason. He is thinking of Rachel and wants to honour her memory. The boys are identified<sup>□5</sup>; Joseph will not deceive him as Jacob himself had once deceived Isaac! He is so grateful to God for being allowed to see his grandchildren<sup>□6</sup>. Joseph formally hands his children over to Jacob<sup>□7</sup>; he is passing the inheritance to them.

**Jacob blesses the boys in a way that underlines the fact that God often chooses the unexpected person** to be the heir of His blessing. It would be normal for the firstborn son to get the greater blessing, but for two generations God has revealed His will that He wishes to choose the unexpected person. God had chosen Isaac not Abraham's much-loved Ishmael. God had chosen Jacob over the firstborn Esau. Jacob has learned a lesson. He knows that God might well give a special blessing to the unexpected person. It is this point that Jacob is expressing when, led by God, he deliberately gives a special blessing to Ephraim, crossing his hand to do so<sup>□1</sup>. Then he prays for Joseph, praying especially for the two boys<sup>□2</sup>. He prays that they will have the faith to identify themselves with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the promise that has been passed down through them<sup>□3</sup>.

□1 47:28

□2 47:29-31a

□3 47:31b

□1 Hebr 11:4

□1 47:28-31

□2 48:1

□3 48:2-4

□4 48:5-6

□5 48:8-10

□6 48:11

□7 48:12

□1 48:13-14

□2 48:15-16a

□3 48:16b

• God has the right to choose – and it may not be the firstborn

• God is sovereign and his long-term purposes are purposes of graciousness

• Jacob gives preferential treatment to Joseph not out of favouritism but with a deliberate purpose!

• God's sovereign graciousness

Joseph does not like Jacob's treating the second-born as the firstborn and tries to get him to give the greater blessing to Manasseh<sup>1</sup> but Jacob is deliberately making the point that the firstborn according to human nature might not be the firstborn in God's choice<sup>2</sup>. Both will have territory but the greater blessing will be for Ephraim.

The whole chapter is therefore about the right of God – and of Jacob! – to choose whoever He wants. God is sovereign and uses people in just the way He wants to. But His sovereignty is used in the interests of grace! When He chose Joseph, He 'meant it for good'<sup>1</sup>. When He chose the younger above the older, the younger had blessings also but He had purposes of grace in the way He would use the younger. Joseph chose Ephraim but he prayed for a blessing on both the two boys. This is the way God's sovereignty works. He chooses to use one and not another. He may even choose to save some and not others, but His long-term purposes are purposes of graciousness.

Jacob himself is underlining this point. His cross-handed blessing has given a little warning that God is a God of surprises. Now he makes the same point in another way. No one ever experienced the amazing sovereignty of God more than Jacob. 'Jacob have I loved!' Jacob gives Joseph one mountain slope more than his brothers in the land of Canaan<sup>1</sup>! Genesis 48:22 refers to some previous conquering of Shechem about which we know nothing. I am sure Jacob was enjoying himself on his deathbed! One last time before he died Jacob is still the same old Jacob. He gives preferential treatment to Joseph again, as he did years before with the coat with long sleeves! But again, it is a word of warning. God can give an extra blessing to whomever He likes! And so can Jacob! He did it before out of favouritism. This time he does it with deliberate purpose. It is a way of saying that God is the God of sovereign graciousness, a God whose freedom is such that no one can control Him or criticize Him. This time, the brothers will have to accept it without jealousy. They will have to accept sovereign graciousness.

Note



1. 'On his staff' is a possible translation if the Hebrew is read as *matteh* rather than *mittah*; the original Hebrew had no vowels. Hebrews 11:21 takes it this way. The other translation would be 'at the head of his bed'.

1 48:17-18

2 48:19-20

1 50:20

1 48:21-22

	<p>Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.</p>	
<p>These specially reformatted chapters "Slices of Bread" produced by Sovereign World Trust are available in three categories as set out below</p>		
<p><b>Slices for the Nations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For pastors, libraries and colleges in those parts of the world where resources are scarce and unaffordable</li> <li>In the fullness of time the whole series will be made available free of charge</li> <li>Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or available to download from the Slices web site</li> </ul>	<p><b>Slices for Sponsors</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those in more prosperous circumstances who can afford to contribute to the development of this material and its distribution with a small monthly donation</li> <li>The same material as Slices for the Nations</li> <li>Weekly emailings of 3 - 4 Slices or by download from the Slices web site</li> </ul>	<p><b>Slices for Everyone / Slice of the Week</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>For those who wish to sample the material or dip into it from time to time, a proportion of the PTTB series is available free of charge</li> <li>Slices for Everyone (as a download) or Slice of the Week (attached to a weekly email)</li> <li>The remainder of the PTTB material is available to Sponsors and those eligible to receive Slices for the Nations</li> </ul>
<p>To subscribe please contact: <a href="mailto:slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk">slicesofbread@sovereignworldtrust.org.uk</a> stating which category fits your situation. Further details are at <a href="http://www.slices.org.uk">www.slices.org.uk</a>          Details of the availability of <i>Preaching Through The Bible</i> books and how they may be purchased can be found on <a href="http://www.ibtr.org.uk">www.ibtr.org.uk</a></p>		