

And they time drew nigh that Israel must die

**Bible Text:** Genesis 37:27-31  
**Preached on:** Sunday, February 22, 2009

“To be or not to be, that is the question.”

And that is that the question that the title character asked in the famous soliloquy in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, Act III and scene one.

And Hamlet goes on to ask,

Whether ‘tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
And by opposing end them?

As this famous soliloquy unfolds, we find that Hamlet is grappling with two thoughts. Should he live or should he die? Should he take his own life?

And as he contemplates he realizes that though he does not like what life has handed to him here on the earth, he does not know what waits for him in that “dream of sleep” as he calls it, that maybe things will be worse off. He has no confidence of what lies beyond the grave.

Now suicide is never the right answer, which is what Hamlet was considering there. But what is your attitude towards your own life? And, more importantly, what is your attitude towards your own death? Regardless of your age, regardless of your health, regardless of how many years you may think you have left up on this earth, life is fleeting and what is your consideration, your anticipation of the day you die?

Paul the apostle found himself in a situation, in some respects, similar to that of Hamlet. In many regards it was very different, but in one way we look at it, we find that it was quite the same.

He wrote to the Church at Philippi in Philippians 1:21, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”<sup>1</sup>

Now, unlike Hamlet Paul was not considering taking his own life, but like Hamlet Paul was weighing what he saw on this earth against that which he saw for himself after departing from this earth. And Paul went on to say, “But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.”<sup>2</sup> He didn’t know what to do. He didn’t know what to want.

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<sup>1</sup> Philippians 1:21.

<sup>2</sup> Philippians 1:22.

For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.<sup>3</sup>

Both Paul and Hamlet are weighing what they see in this earth against what they see in the afterlife. Hamlet had no idea what waited for him. He saw his life as miserable, but he saw what lay beyond the grave as, perhaps, worse, for he did not know what to expect.

Paul saw his life on the earth full of purpose and he saw what waited beyond the grave full of God's glorious purpose. And he was ready to go, but willing to stay.

What is your confidence about what happens after you die from this life?

Death is the subject that is brought before us as we enter the end of Genesis chapter 47. In the beginning of Genesis 49:29 we read, "And the time drew nigh that Israel must die."<sup>4</sup> The life of the man Israel—who we also know as Jacob—was coming to an end. And, of course, that should not be a surprise to us.

Look back one verse to Genesis 47:28. We learn that Jacob was 147 years old. "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years."<sup>5</sup>

And if we look down just a few verses to the beginning of chapter 48 we learn that Jacob was a sick man. "And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick."<sup>6</sup>

And so there is no surprise to us, at 147 years old, as he has gotten sick that the time for Jacob to die was coming soon. After all, everybody dies. It is a fact that no one of us will escape in this world. With very few notable exceptions—Elijah and Enoch and those who are alive when the Lord comes back—every single one of us at some point has a death with death.

But the death of Jacob is significant to us because in the death of Jacob we are coming to the end of an era, a clear demarcation in the Bible where the lives of the patriarchs are coming to an end. We will move on to Exodus and begin a new chapter in the nation of Israel, but the lives of the patriarchs are coming to an end.

With little exception the rest of the book of Genesis surrounds the events of Jacob's death. You see, here in Genesis 47 we have the first announcement that it is impending. Jacob was ready for his death: "And the time drew nigh," verse 29, "that Israel must die."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 1:23-24.

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 47:29.

<sup>5</sup> Genesis 47:28.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 48:1.

<sup>7</sup> Genesis 47:29.

But we don't read of Jacob's final words until we get to the end of chapter 49. We don't find him being buried in the grave until Genesis chapter 50, the very last chapter of the book. And so starting here in Genesis 47, going all the way through 48, all the way through 49 and into Genesis chapter 50 this book is concerned with the events that surrounded the death of Jacob. And that ought to tell us that this is a significant event for us to take notice of.

But I want you to notice that Genesis 47:29 isn't the first time that Joseph started contemplating his death. It is not the first time he began to think about. Jacob had been thinking about his death, preparing for his death for a number of years.

You may recall when Jacob was first reunited to Joseph, when he first learned that Joseph was still alive he said in Genesis 45:28, "It is enough; Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go and see him before I die."<sup>8</sup>

Jacob did not believe that he was going to die at that moment. But he was looking forward before his death to seeing his son Joseph. He realized that with death coming the death would probably precede it.

And then a very little bit of time later when he was finally reunited with Joseph, he speaks again about his death in Genesis 46:30. He said, "Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive."<sup>9</sup>

And as we saw when we looked at this passage the first time, Jacob had no estimation at that point that he was about to die. He did not have a death wish. He was not expecting to die very shortly. But he said that he was content now. He felt that his life was fulfilled for he had been reunited with his beloved son Joseph. God had given him everything he could ask for in this life and he was ready to die.

But what I want to see from the passage before us today and what I want us to consider together is that Jacob was ready to die. Jacob embraced the thought of dying. And he was comfortable with it.

Now, as it turns out, after Jacob and Joseph were brought together again, Jacob still had 17 years left to live. Look at Genesis 47:28 again. It says, "And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years."<sup>10</sup>

That is spoken about the time he lived in Egypt. Well, he was reunited with Joseph when he came to Egypt. He had another 17 years to live with his son, which, incidentally, was the same amount of time he had with Joseph before he was sent into slavery. Genesis 37 verse two tells us that Joseph was 17 years old when his brothers sold him to the

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<sup>8</sup> Genesis 45:28.

<sup>9</sup> Genesis 46:30.

<sup>10</sup> Genesis 47:28.

Ishmaelite traders. Seventeen year they had together, 22 years followed in separation and now Jacob and Joseph would have 17 more years together before Jacob left the scene.

But the point is that throughout those years of Jacob's life he was not afraid of dying. He was a Christian lived in faith believing the promises of God and content with the idea that one day he would die. Twice we have seen in this episode with the reunification with Joseph he mentioned his own dying. And what I want us to see in these verses at the end of Genesis 47 today is that Jacob was prepared to die. He was not fighting it. He was not dreading it. In fact, I believe we are going to see that Jacob met his death with joy, with faith and with a desire to be in covenant with God.

Now, fast forward with me to Genesis chapter 49, just a page or two over in your Bible, and read with me some of Jacob's final words. It appears that when the imminent death of Jacob was come to him he was wonderfully peaceful, practical and contented in his Spirit.

In Genesis 49:29 Jacob said, "I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite."<sup>11</sup> He said, "I am to be gathered to my people."<sup>12</sup> He saw his death as something that was sure. He saw his death as something that was soon to be upon him. But notice, also, that Jacob saw his death as something that was passive. That is, he knew that it wasn't something that he controlled. He understood—as we all ought to understand—that it is God who controls the day of our death. Jacob said that he would be gathered to himself.

You know, regardless of our age we need to come to grips with that, that whether we die today, whether we die 50 or 100 years from now, the day of our death is appointed by God. It is known by God. Jacob saw his death as a gathering. He said, "I am to be gathered to my people."<sup>13</sup>

So Jacob did not see death as the end. He saw it as moving on to be brought together with those to whom he belonged. And we wonder what he meant by this. To whom was he expecting to be gathered? It was not simply to God because he said he expected to be gathered to "my people." He was speaking of many people in the plural.

What did he mean when he spoke of these people? Did he mean his father Isaac and his mother Rebekah and his grandparents Abraham and Sarah? I think he did. But when Jacob said, "I am to be gathered to my people,"<sup>14</sup> he meant more than that. I think Jacob understood that in his death he would be gathered to all the faithful, all those who are truly in Christ, in the Messiah as he saw him. That is, he saw himself as being gathered to the Lord's people.

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<sup>11</sup> Genesis 49:29.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

When the believer dies he is gathered, finally, into that eternal communion of the saints gathered together at the throne of God.

Is that your perspective on death? Have you given thought to your death and if you have, are you expecting to be with God for all eternity? Do you expect it to be a time of fear and dread, or do you see your death as a precious time?

God sees death as a precious time. In the 116<sup>th</sup> Psalm we are told, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.”<sup>15</sup> We ought to view our death as God views our death. And death is precious to the believer. I believe it was precious to Paul. I believe it was precious to Jacob.

Death, for the believer is not the end. It is the time when we are gathered together with all the Lord’s people, to be before the Lord’s face, to worship him, to put every tear and pain and ache and sin of this world behind us and to enjoy what is aptly called glory.

And so while there is sorrow at loss in this temporal realm, the Christian ought to be looking towards death with a sense of joy. We ought to be prepared at any age to see the eventuality of our death as something that comes naturally and as something that is joyful for the Christian.

Now, none of this means that we ignore or deny the sorrow that comes with death, especially for those who are left remaining upon the earth. But by the same token we don’t want to ignore and deny the joy that comes with death.

The whole world knows that death is inevitable.

But over the next few weeks we are going to be looking together at these events surrounding the death of Jacob. It is the end of an era.

But for today, before we move on to that, this little passage at the end of Genesis 47, I want us to spend our time particularly considering the few verses of this chapter which tell us about the death of a Christian who dies in faith.

And our attention is drawn, first, to these words that we see at the beginning of Genesis 47:29 which tell us, “And the time drew nigh that Israel must die.”<sup>16</sup>

Notice with me the certainty expressed in this verse. It doesn’t say, “And the time drew nigh for Jacob to die.” It says, “And the time drew nigh that Israel *must* die.” You see, there is absolutely no question about it. It is something that must happen.

Moses, who is the author of this book, inspired by the Holy Spirit speaks to us an omniscient third person narrator. He said, “And the time drew nigh that Israel must

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<sup>15</sup> Psalm 116:15.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 47:29.

die.”<sup>17</sup> And as we have said, unless any one of us is alive when Christ returns, every one of us must die.

The world thinks it can push off death. The world thinks we can delay death and push it into the future. The doctors think they can do it. The philosophers think they can do it. Those with a vain imagination about themselves think that they can do it. But the best they are ever doing is only delaying things from their own perspective, what they thought would have been their death date they have changed.

But in reality they are not doing so.

The Bible tells us that the day that each one of us is to die is fixed. Hebrews 9:27, “It is appointed unto men once to die.”<sup>18</sup> That is, God has appointed the day of your death. It is certain. It has been certain in the providence of God.

You, your doctor, your philosopher, snake oil salesman or anyone else that you might want to talk to cannot do a think about delaying the date of your death. Just as with Jacob, unless the Lord returns first, there is a specified certain date when each one of us will die; unknown to us, but known to God. It is certain because God is the one who has appointed it.

But, you know, that is not all that Hebrews 9:27 teaches us. This same verse that speaks to us about the certainty of the time of our death goes on to say, “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.”<sup>19</sup>

You see, death is not the only thing that is certain. It is also certain that each one of us—believers included—will meet a judgment after death.

People like to quote Benjamin Franklin who spoke about the founding of the United States Constitution and said, “Everything appears to promise that it will last, but in this world nothing is certain but death and taxes.”

And we get a chuckle when we think about what Benjamin Franklin said there, the apparent truth in what he said. But he was not correct in what he said. He said the only certain things are death and taxes. And he was wrong. Death is certain, taxes are certain, but so is the judgment.

One of the things that is certain in this world is that every one of us, believers included, will face judgment one day. Now, Jacob, as a believer, confidently expected there would be a judgment, but he also expected that he would stand in that judgment according to the promises of God and that he would stand. The judgment is where the determination is made of our eternal destiny, whether it will be heaven or hell. There are not other choices. And as a believer planned to stand before that judgment in complete faith.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Hebrews 9:27.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

He took joy in God's promises. Jacob understood as a believer he would stand at the judgment in his own stead. He would not stand in the judgment based upon only himself. For if that were the case Jacob would have been most miserable knowing that he ought to be condemned in hell for all eternity.

Remember, Jacob had spent a great part of his life lying and cheating and swindling people. Yes, by the end of his life he was reformed to a degree, but how was he going to answer at the judgment for all the sin in his life before that time? There was nothing in Jacob which made him worthy of anything but condemnation at the hand of God in the judgment following death for God requires absolute perfect obedience.

Jacob was a swindler for much of his life. Even after he was reformed he was not perfect. How was he to make up for the sin, the falling short in his life? Jacob had no means in himself to answer for the sins and the folly of his own life. And that is the way it will be for every single one of us who stands before the judgment of God.

And yet Jacob faced death and the judgment joyfully. Jacob stood in the promises that God had given his people that he would send a Messiah, he would send a Redeemer. It was a promise given first to Adam and Eve. That they would be rescued from their sins. It was a promise God reiterated to Noah and then eventually to Abraham and to Isaac and now to Jacob himself. He was going to send one, the Messiah, the anointed one, to redeem a people from their sins.

And every true Christian can face death in that same way. If you are a Christian death offers no threat to you. There is nothing to fear for the believer in death. Those whom God will save have their hearts changed by God such that they live in faith. And so do you fear death? Do you fear the judgment that comes?

Maybe you haven't given serious thought to death and the judgment that comes. You ought to. But when you give it that thought, do you fear death? Do you fear facing God after your death?

If you do, ask yourself why that is the case.

Now, I am not asking you if there is some sorrow in your heart at the thought of death, that in your heart there is some sorrow for things you might have wanted to accomplish on this earth, that there might not be sorrow in your heart for those who will be left behind. But when it comes to actual death, when it comes to the actual judgment, if you genuinely fear the judgment of God ask yourself why that is. And it can only be because you are not standing in complete faith that God's redeemer will speak for you, that Jesus Christ will claim you as his own at the judgment day.

Today is—the Bible says—the day to flee to God. Today is the day of salvation.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See 2 Corinthians 6:2.

And Jesus said in John 6:37 that no one given to him by the Father will ever be cast away,<sup>21</sup> which is to say that no one who has genuine, God given, life changing, heart changing faith will come to Christ and be cast away by Christ.

But I want you to notice something else with me about this verse, Genesis 47:29. It tells us, “And the time drew nigh that Israel must die.”<sup>22</sup> Not only does it speak—must—of the certainty of the death, but look at whose death it is speaking of. It says, “Israel must die.”<sup>23</sup>

And the point is we want to see that it doesn’t say, “Jacob must die.” It says, “Israel must die.”<sup>24</sup>

Now, certainly whether we speak about Jacob or whether we speak about Israel we are speaking about the same man. It shouldn’t matter which one we call him. And yet we see as we study this life and as we study through the Bible, the name that is selected—Jacob or Israel—makes a difference sometimes.

Jacob was the name that this man was given when he was born. Let me read to you the account of his birth in Genesis 25:26. It says, “And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau’s heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when [Rebekah] bare them,”<sup>25</sup> the twins.

From the very beginning Jacob was clawing, grabbing at his brother’s heel in the womb to get ahead because even in the womb these two brothers, these two boys were fighting with each other for preeminence. And seeing this go on, his parents consciously named him Jacob which means supplanter. It means one who claws to get ahead, sometimes through deceit, sometimes through trickery. And it is a name that Jacob through most of his life.

You remember that Jacob extorted the birth right from his brother Esau. For a simple bowl of pottage he got his brother to give him the birth right. It was extortion.

Jacob and his mother tricked the father Isaac by concealing Jacob’s identity in order to steal the blessing from Isaac.

And Jacob used superstition, thinking that he was stealing from his uncle Laban when called to tend those flocks. Jacob was a supplanter. Jacob was a liar who trusted in no one but himself. And he thought by climbing, clawing and scheming he would get ahead in this world.

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<sup>21</sup> See John 6:37.

<sup>22</sup> Genesis 47:29.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Genesis 25:26.

And so the name that was given to him at his birth fit him very well for that first part of his life. But then, coming back from Padanaram, he stopped at Penuel, the place whose name means “face to face with God.” And there he was changed, there he was gloriously saved.

And the angel of God—who believe is the Lord Jesus Christ—wrestled with him and said to him in Genesis 32:28, “Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.”<sup>26</sup> It was at Penuel when he was saved that Jacob was given the new name, Israel.

Now turn with me in your Bible to Romans chapter nine. For there we will truly understand what the name Israel means.

The angel wrestled with Jacob and changed his name to Israel and said that it speaks of one who is a prince with God. He said it is one who has contended with God and prevailed.

And one of the most neglected truths in all of Scripture is the fact that Israel is not just a name for this man. It is not just a name for those who physically descended from him. The name Israel is for all those who are princes with God, for those who contend with God and prevail, whether that man is a Jew or a Gentile.

In its truest meaning it is not the name of those who descended from Abraham by physical lineage. It is the name of those who followed Abraham in Abraham’s faith.

Now Paul explained this when he wrote to the Church at Rome in Romans 9 beginning at verse six. He said, “For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel.”<sup>27</sup> Not every one born into the nation of Israel is Israel before God. Not everyone who is a descendant physically of Abraham is part of the kingdom of God.

Look at verse seven. “Neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.”<sup>28</sup>

Paul says, “To begin with, there were more children given to Abraham than just Isaac. There was Ishmael. It is Isaac in whom the promise was.” Scripture says, “In Isaac shall thy seed by called.”<sup>29</sup>

Look at verse eight. Paul says, “That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God.”<sup>30</sup> Simply being born into the family of Abraham as a physical descendant of Abraham does not make you Israel. Being a descendant of Jacob physically does not make you a child of God.

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<sup>26</sup> Genesis 32:28.

<sup>27</sup> Romans 9:6.

<sup>28</sup> Romans 9:7.

<sup>29</sup> Genesis 21:12.

<sup>30</sup> Romans 9:8.

“That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed.”<sup>31</sup>

The true children of Abraham in this world are not those who follow him after the flesh, after physical descent. They are those who follow him after the pattern of faith. And Paul is describing to us here that there are some among ethnic Israel who are not a part of the kingdom of God. And likewise there are some who are part of the kingdom of God who are not part of the nation of Israel. Some Jews are not saved. Some who are not Jews are saved. And some Jews are saved.

Israel is the name God gives to those who follow after him by faith, whose hearts have been changed.

And in Genesis chapter 47 the Holy Spirit did not inspire Moses to write that he came when Jacob must die. He specifically wrote, “And the time drew nigh that Israel must die.”<sup>32</sup> And the name here used is the name of the man of faith.

You see, believers must die. It is not just the world that dies, but it is man that dies. And this is something that has been going on from the very beginning.

God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden. He spoke to Adam and warned him of the tree he was not to touch. And in Genesis chapter two and verse 17 God spoke to Adam, “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”<sup>33</sup>

This was a curse upon all mankind. Every man will die. And Paul explains to us in Romans 5:12, “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.”<sup>34</sup>

We have all sinned. We all have the original sin of Adam in us and we all die. Believers die just as non believers die.

But now if you are still in Romans chapter five turn over a few more pages to 1 Corinthians chapter 15.

And so even though the saved will die, the apostle Paul gives us the proper perspective upon that death. Yes, we will die, but death will not have mastery over us.

We read in 1 Corinthians 15 beginning at verse 55 that Paul wrote, “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”<sup>35</sup> What happens to the sting of death? What is the sting of death?

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Genesis 47:29.

<sup>33</sup> Genesis 2:17.

<sup>34</sup> Romans 5:12.

Verse 56. “The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.”<sup>36</sup> That is what the sting of death is. The sting of death is the judgment of God that awaits us because we are sinful people.

But look at verse 57. “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>37</sup>

Are you familiar with these words? They are read often at funerals. But what do they mean? Paul said that death does not have sting for the believer, that that wrath and condemnation of God which comes before all men at the judgment will not rest upon those who are believers. Why? Because Jesus Christ has taken it for us. “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>38</sup>

Death continues. Death, at this point, has not abated, though Christ has redeemed a people. We still face death. What we don’t face, as believers, is the sting of death, the condemnation of God, the wrath of God for our sins because that wrath has been taken in Jesus Christ.

And so Jacob and every believer faces death in joy knowing the promise that Christ has taken the wrath.

When did Christ take that for us? He took it when he was crucified. And he didn’t take it simply in the pain he bore on the cross. Other men have borne the pain of the cross. Other men have died on the cross. What Jesus Christ took for us was the separation from God. He bore the wrath of God upon that cross, a wrath that every non believer will be exposed to for all eternity after death. But a wrath that the believer is rescued from because Jesus Christ drank that cup dry.

And so death remains. For the believer the sting of death was taken by Jesus Christ.

Now if you are still in 1 Corinthians look up just a few verses to verse 26 because there we learn that death is not forever. It says, “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.”<sup>39</sup> Death will be done away with before we all come to glory.

And so Jacob, a faithful man, could die in peace. He could look forward to his death because the sting of death is taken away.

But not only did Jacob have joy in his death, we see that he had faith in his death. In fact, we see that the greatest, most noteworthy faith in Jacob’s life happened at his death.

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<sup>35</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:55.

<sup>36</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:56.

<sup>37</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:57.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:26.

Read with me a little further in the passage that is before us today. Read with me from Genesis 47 verse 29 down to verse 31. Again it says:

And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.<sup>40</sup>

Here, as I indicated, is the most noteworthy example of faith in Jacob's entire life. Do you see it there? It is right in the last verse which says, "And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head."<sup>41</sup>

Now, it might not be apparent to us, simply reading that verse that that is the most noteworthy example of faith in Jacob's life, but the Scripture tells us that that is the truth. Without an explanation we are puzzled by this idea.

We would say, "How could Jacob's dying be the greatest act of faith?" After all, when we studied his conversion at Penuel we said that he was a new creature in Christ. We applied the conversion of Jacob to 2 Corinthians 5:17. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."<sup>42</sup> And we spent a number of weeks looking at all the changes in Jacob's life, the changes in his attitude, the changes in his behavior, the changes in his whole life. And we said that these changes were manifested in his life because he was a new creature in Christ, because from that moment he had true God given faith.

And so after all that faith, why do we come to the end of Genesis 47 and say that his most noteworthy faith is here in verse 31? "And he said, Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head."<sup>43</sup>

Why?

Well, turn with me, if you would, to the New Testament and Hebrews chapter 11. Hebrews chapter 11 is that chapter that is often called the hall of faith. It is where God tells us about many of the saints who lived in the Old Testament who had faith, who lived their lives by faith. Some of the characters in that chapter, Hebrews 11, we are given a bit of detail about their lives. Others we are given just a phrase, sometimes just a word or two.

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<sup>40</sup> Genesis 47:29-31.

<sup>41</sup> Genesis 47:31.

<sup>42</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 47:31.

But in each case, catalogued for us there in Hebrews chapter 11 is an example of great faith in the individual's life. And Hebrews chapter 11 gives us just one verse about Jacob, one verse to sum up all the faith of this man's life and it is found in verse 21.

It says, "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."<sup>44</sup>

Now, in our next study we hope to examine this blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh that begins with the next chapter, chapter 48. But it is not just that blessing which is the example of Jacob's faith here. It was his actual dying.

Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."<sup>45</sup>

Now I don't want to get in, today, to the fact that the New Testament says he leaned on his staff and the Old Testament says he leaned on his bed's head. I think that discussion, though appropriate, would be a distraction from what we are considering today.

The fact is that in Jacob's death he exhibited great faith. He exhibited faith that was noteworthy, faith that was worthy of recording in the hall of faith in Hebrews chapter 11. And the question is: Why? Why was the death of Jacob the most noteworthy example of faith to be included here in Hebrews chapter 11?

Well, the answer is something we discussed together only a few weeks ago. Jacob what he was taking his family into. Jacob know what leaving his family behind in Egypt was all about. He knew there were 400 years of slavery waiting for his descendants after he passed on. But Jacob brought his family there anyway because God had said in Genesis 46:3, "I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation."<sup>46</sup>

You see, the promise of turning the descendants into a great nation, the promise that the Messiah would come through this family, was predicated on the fact that this nation would be built into a nation in the bondage of Egypt. Jacob understood that.

And Jacob balanced, as he died, the knowledge of what his descendants would go through with the knowledge of what God was doing in that family as he took them through.

Jacob was prepared to die full of joy for what awaited him. He died full of faith in what God was doing.

Jacob was standing in the promises of God and he was not standing in fear. And so his worshipping here shows us that he had faith. He had joy, he had faith. I want us to see,

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<sup>44</sup> Hebrews 11:21.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Genesis 46:3.

finally, that he wanted to die in the covenant, that his death was going to be a mark of the covenant with God.

What was it that he asked Joseph to do for him in his death?

Read with me, again, verse 29. It says, “And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.”<sup>47</sup>

Now, Jacob’s request here was not to be buried in Egypt.

But before we actually consider that request I want us to see one more thing. This was a fulfillment of Joseph’s dream. Remember Joseph’s dream that he would be raised and that his brothers would bow down before him? The second dream was that the sun and the moon would join the stars in bowing down to him. And Jacob, back at the time, interpreted that indignantly as saying he would bow down before Joseph.

Here is Jacob preparing to die and bowing in obeisance before Joseph. He says, “If now I have found grace in thy sight...”<sup>48</sup> This is the words of an inferior spoken to a superior. This is the father speaking to the son as the inferior. “If now I have found grace in thy sight...”<sup>49</sup> It is a fulfillment of the prophecy.

But what did he ask?

His request was, “bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt.”<sup>50</sup>

And in the end of verse 30 Joseph assured him, “Yes, father, that is what I will do.” Genesis 47:30. “And he said, I will do as thou hast said.”<sup>51</sup>

But notice: In verse 31 Jacob went on to say, “Swear unto me. And he sware unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed’s head.”<sup>52</sup>

Why was it so important that Jacob be buried in Canaan?

Well, he gives us the reason at the beginning of verse 30. He said, “But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace.”<sup>53</sup>

Jacob wanted to be buried in that cave of Machpelah at the end of the field purchased from Ephron the Hittite. This is where Abraham buried Sarah. It is where Isaac and

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<sup>47</sup> Genesis 47:29.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Genesis 47:30.

<sup>52</sup> Genesis 47:31.

<sup>53</sup> Genesis 47:30.

Ishmael buried Abraham. It is where Esau and Jacob buried Isaac. This is where Jacob wanted to be buried.

Jacob wanted not merely a promise from Joseph. He wanted an oath from Joseph. He said, "Swear to me that you will take me up to there."

Why?

Was there just an emotional attachment to desire to have his dead bones laid next to his father's and his grandfather's bones.

It is much more than that. I think it is Jacob's understanding the promises of God, understanding that this was a land that God had promised not just to Abraham, but to his descendants. Jacob understood the covenant and therefore wanted to be buried in that land that God had promised to his people. Jacob believed that God would deliver his people from Egypt. He understood the hardship of bondage that was waiting for them for 400 years. But he also believed that there was a deliverance coming when according to God's Word, the people of God would be returned to the covenant land.

This is the kind of faith that believers die in today. Believers die in joy knowing that the sting of death has been removed. Believers die in faith knowing that what happens on this earth after they are gone is all according to God's appointed will. And they die in the covenant knowing that God will bring his people together. And all those with Jacob will be gathered unto their people in glory one day.

What is your perspective on the grave?

Hamlet did not know what to expect. He did not like his life. He was afraid at what the prospect of death was.

Paul rejoiced at the task he was given to do upon this earth and yet rejoiced in the greater glory that awaited him with the Father forever in heaven.

And Jacob had joy, Jacob had faith, Jacob lived in the covenant. That is where we are to be as we approach our death.

For any one of us it could be today. For any one of us it could be 100 years away. But it is something we need to give thought to. And it is something that we need to embrace with joy, with faith and in the covenant. Amen.