

Jacob demonstrates in the last chapters of Genesis that he was finishing his life well. It is the event of this chapter which the writer of Hebrews selects as the mark of Jacob's faith (Hebrews 11:21). Jacob is here predominantly called Israel, his new name signifying his special relationship to God. We may finish our lives at any time and should want with Jacob to finish well when we stand before Christ. This chapter provides three particular acts of faith to imitate from the life of Jacob.

**I. By faith Israel held to the promises of God.****1. He held to the promises of God by remembering them.**

From God's promises at Bethel some 40 years earlier (Gen 35:11) Jacob quoted the blessing of fruitfulness and the promise of the land. To the latter he added the quality of the possession promised to Abraham (Genesis 13 & 17), that it would be an eternal possession. Jacob appropriately did not quote the promise of "kings", since the kingly line in Israel would be through Judah and not Joseph. Jacob held to the promises of God as he correctly understood them and kept them in mind.

**2. He held to the promises of God by remembering the God of those promises.**

Jacob begins with the reminder that "God Almighty [El Shaddai] appeared to me ... and blessed me." This is the name connected with God in the giving of His blessings and promises to the Patriarchs (Gen 17:1; 28:3; 35:11). HE is all-powerful, all-sufficient to do what He has promised.

**3. He held to the promises of God in claiming the sons of Joseph, Ephraim & Manasseh, as his own..**

Jacob was calling upon Ephraim & Manasseh, who were born and raised in Egypt, to choose Israel over Egypt. Jacob believed that all his descendants now fell within the covenant blessing of God unlike earlier when Ishmael and then Esau were excluded. (It is possible that Jacob was also giving Rachel, his favored wife, special honor by giving her a greater portion among the children.) Jacob trusted God to make these two young men part of Israel, already switching the order of their names in anticipation of the blessing to come.

Jacob/Israel held firmly to the promises of God, as should we, remembering them, remembering the God who made them and claiming the truths of them.

**II. By faith Israel accepted God's revelation of Himself (cf. vv 15-16).****1. "the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked"**

This was God's challenge to Abraham when confirming His covenant, "walk before me" (Gen 17:1f), and the basis of Abraham's assurance to Eliezer when getting a wife for Isaac, "The LORD, before whom I have walked, will send his angel with you" (Gen 24:40). When used elsewhere it includes the task of living uprightly and the promise of God fulfilling His promises. Jacob fully expects God to fulfil His promises in accord with His Word.

**2. "the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day"**

This is the first reference to God as one's shepherd (cf. 49:24). From such passages as Psalm 23 and John 10 we understand that Jacob knew and trusted God as the One who knew him, who provided for him, who led him and protected him.

**3. "the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm"**

The term "delivered" (NIV) is elsewhere translated "redeemed" and is the first time that God is called a Redeemer. The primary sense is to deliver kinsmen from difficulty or danger. God's role in the Psalms and Prophets as Redeemer was to "stand up for his people and vindicate them." God is the "Angel" (or messenger) who has appeared to Abraham, Hagar and Jacob. He is the God of Bethel (Genesis 31:11-13) who protected Jacob from the harm that Laban attempted.

We, like Jacob, need to have a growing understanding of who God is and to embrace those truths about God.

**III. By faith Israel acted on the promise and character of God.****1. Jacob preserved God's sovereign prerogative to choose one over another.**

Jacob gave preference to the younger son over the older as he purposefully crossed his arms to place his right hand on the head of Ephraim. Though Joseph initially objected to this – it was contrary to the cultural norm – he then accepted Jacob's action. Such sovereign choice of a younger was a pattern, e.g., Seth, Shem, Abram, Ishmael, Jacob. Jacob acted in faith that God was doing right, when he followed God's sovereign direction to bless the younger over the firstborn.

**2. Jacob planned concerning the land on the basis of God's promises.**

Jacob was confident that his descendants ("you" is plural in v 21) would return to the land which God had promised them. On this basis Jacob gave to Joseph a special land grant (v 22). Although Jacob's acquisition of this land is probably not recorded in Genesis, we still see his confidence that Israel would return. Israel believed God and acted upon what he believed.

God desires of us that we trust Him, too. We should grow in our knowledge of Him and His promises and act upon the basis of what we know. It is not a belief in what we want, but in who God is and what He has said. All spiritual blessings already belong to those who are in Christ.