

Hebrews 11:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.

Analysis

By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. On his deathbed in Egypt, Jacob exercised faith by blessing Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48), allocating the covenant inheritance to the next generation. His worship while 'leaning upon the top of his staff' pictures weakness sustained by divine strength—an old man's body failing but faith remaining vigorous. The staff represents both physical support and the pilgrim's walking stick, symbolizing his lifelong journey of faith.

Jacob's crossing of his hands to give the superior blessing to younger Ephraim over firstborn Manasseh (Genesis 48:14) again demonstrates God's sovereign election transcending cultural norms. Despite Joseph's protest, Jacob insisted on God's revealed will, prophetically establishing that Ephraim's descendants would surpass Manasseh's. This continues the pattern of God choosing younger over older—Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Ephraim over Manasseh—emphasizing that covenant blessing flows from grace, not natural right.

Jacob's worship at life's end reveals genuine faith's perseverance. After a lifetime of struggle, scheming, suffering, and eventual transformation, Jacob died as 'Israel'—a prince with God. His worship wasn't based on comfortable circumstances (he was in Egypt, not the Promised Land) but on God's faithful promises. True faith endures to the end, worshipping God in weakness, trusting His purposes will prevail beyond our own lifetimes.

Historical Context

Jacob lived approximately 1750 BC and died in Egypt where his family had sought refuge from famine. Though patriarch of God's covenant people, he spent his final seventeen years in foreign land, never possessing Canaan except for a burial plot. Yet he made Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan with Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 47:29-31), demonstrating faith in God's promise that his descendants would inherit the land. Ancient Egyptian culture valued dying in one's homeland; Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan testified to his true citizenship being in the Promised Land, not Egypt.

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Jacob's example challenge you to persevere in faith even when God's promises aren't fulfilled in your lifetime?
2. What does Jacob's worship in weakness teach about genuine faith during suffering or physical decline?
3. In what ways are you 'leaning on your staff'—depending on God's strength when your own fails?

Interlinear Text

Πίστει	Ἰακὼβ	ἀποθνήσκων	ἔκαστον	τῶν	υἱῶν	Ἰωσὴφ
By faith	Jacob	when he was a dying	both	G3588	the sons	of Joseph
G4102	G2384	G599	G1538		G5207	G2501
εὐλόγησεν	καὶ	προσεκύνησεν	ἐπὶ	τὸ	ἄκρον	τῆς
blessed	and	worshipped	leaning upon	G3588	the top	G3588
G2127	G2532	G4352	G1909		G206	
ῥάβδου	αὐτοῦ					
staff	of his					
G4464	G846					

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