

Genesis 47 - 49

How To Be A Hero

If someone asked you to define the word "hero" what would you say? The thesaurus lists synonyms like champion, conqueror, victor, man of courage, warrior, soldier, fighter.

Reading through a list like that makes us think of some super fighter or tough guy. Obviously someone who meets that description could do something heroic.

But the real heroes aren't necessarily those who are recognized by the culture in which they live. The real heroes are recognized by God. God is on the lookout for heroes.

And you know where God looks when He looks for heroes? He looks in a place like this. He looks for people like you and like me.

Now, you might be inclined to say at this point, "Boy that sure leaves me out. I could never come close to qualifying as a hero in God's eyes. I'm no Moses, I'm no Paul, I'm just me."

Well, you know, as I look into the Bible I find that very often God's heroes are pretty ordinary people.

They're ordinary people who are overlooked by the world, but not by God because while they might be ordinary people, they have one thing that sets them apart from the rest. That one thing is an extraordinary faith.

When you read over the list of God's heroes in Hebrew chapter 11 (God's hall of fame) you see that for the most part they're ordinary people who simply took God at His word.

And that means that regardless of our first reaction to the idea of being a hero for God, every one of us can be. Everyone of us can be eternally marked by God as a hero in His eyes.

Now how can we be heroes for God? What's God looking for in His people? The answer's found in the closing chapters of the book of Genesis and the story of the death of Jacob.

The reason that I know that God is pleased with Jacob's actions at this point is because He included two of them in the great faith chapter in Hebrews 11.

So just to get oriented, before we begin in Genesis, I'd like us to look there at Hebrews 11 and verse 21.

Open your Bible to **Hebrews 11** page 1069 Read verse 21

That is kind of a strange verse, isn't it? It comes right in the middle of a chapter that tells us about Noah building the ark, Abraham leaving all to follow God, and Moses leading his people through the Red Sea. Sure these people were heroes. Look at the things they did.

But now the only thing that God tells us is that he blessed Joseph's sons and leaned on his staff and worshipped. That doesn't sound very heroic.

Why did that rate a mention in God's hall of fame?

Well, go **back with me now to Genesis 47 (page 47)** and as we answer the question about Jacob we'll find how we can qualify as a hero in God's eyes, too.

I. To Be God's Hero We Need To Claim God's Promises As Being As Good As Fulfilled

Read Genesis 47: 27, 28

God had brought His people into Egypt by this time. Joseph was Prime Minister of the land and had seen the nation through a 7 year famine. His father and his brothers were now living in Egypt where it was God's design to isolate them and develop them into the nation of Israel.

Verse 28 tells us that Jacob has been there 17 years which means that the famine had been over for 12 years now.

For 17 years he had been surrounded by pomp and splendor as the honored father of Egypt's greatest Prime Minister. For 17 years every thing that the world has to offer has been made available to him.

He had 17 years in which to lose his commitment to God because of wealth and ease. 17 years in Egypt!

But notice where Jacob's heart was... **Read verses 29 - 31**

Putting the hand under another's thigh was an ancient way of swearing an oath. And here Jacob calls Joseph and makes him swear an oath that he would not bury him in Egypt.

Jacob was in Egypt for 17 years but Egypt wasn't in him. He was in the world but not of it. He lived in Egypt but his heart was in Canaan where God had put his name.

Do you want to be a hero for God? Then do what Jacob did. Do what God draws upon out of Jacob's whole life as worthy of mention.

A hero for God claims the promises of God as good as being fulfilled. And that is just what Jacob did.

We might tend to look at this oath that Jacob demanded from his Joseph as something trivial. God refers to it as an act of faith.

And the reason is this. As Jacob is about to die, he clings to a promise that God gave to his grandfather Abraham, his father Isaac and to him also. The promise was that the land of Canaan (that we know as Palestine and Israel today) was to be theirs. And with that promise of the land was the promise of a great blessing.

This wasn't some sentimental thing with Jacob. He wanted to be buried in Canaan because it had been promised to him by God. He didn't want to be buried in Egypt far from the land of promise. He said, "Even though I'm not alive to see the fulfillment, I believe that God has promised this land to us as His people." Jacob could see beyond death.

And so verse 31 concludes, *So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.*

It means he bowed in worship to Almighty God. In the New Testament God tells us to acknowledge Jacob's trust in God who had blessed him in life and who would continue to bless him in death. That is the confidence of faith.

In other words, God is holding Jacob up and saying, "Look at this guy. He had so much faith in My promise that the land of Canaan would belong to him and his descendants that he wants his bones buried there when he dies."

Now, I'm sure that you've already picked up on what seems to be a discrepancy between Genesis and Hebrews.

In Genesis Jacob leaned on his bed and in Hebrews he's said to lean on his staff. This is the kind of thing that causes people to say that the Bible really isn't inerrant but that it has contradictions and mistakes.

Of course the important thing is that Jacob worshipped God.

Now it could very well be that as Jacob sat at the edge of his bed, an old and dying man, that in his weakness he leaned on his staff to support himself. So therefore both accounts would be correct.

That is one very plausible explanation.

Another, that is even more likely, is that the writer of Hebrews quotes the Septuagint instead of the Hebrew text. The Septuagint was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament.

In Hebrew the word for "staff" is *matteh* and the word for "bed" is *mittah*. Same consonants, different vowels.

Up until the 6th century AD Hebrew was written without any vowels. By then the Jewish people (who spoke other languages) were forgetting Hebrew and its pronunciation. So Hebrew scholars called Massoretes developed vowel signs, or what's called vowel pointing.

When they read the consonants MTH, they read it as *mittah* - "bed."

The Septuagint translators who worked at least 7 centuries before them read MTH as *matteh* - "staff."

Actually it's not a contradiction but a question of how to read the Hebrew.

Which ever way we take it though, the point is still the same. Jacob believed the promise of God and wanted to be buried in the land that God had promised to him. God had promised him the land of Canaan. God had promised to bring him back into the land from Egypt.

Now as his son makes this oath, Jacob bows and thanks God for the assurance that

His promises will be fulfilled.

That's really the essence of faith. Believing God. That's a mark of a hero for God. That's a mark that everyone of us can attain.

The people who believe that God's promises are as good as fulfilled, are heroes in God's eyes.

In English we think of 3 basic verb tenses, past, present, and future. All have to do with time. In Hebrew there are only two tenses, perfect and imperfect and they have to do with types of action. Perfect shows completed action and imperfect shows incomplete action. Normally if you'd speak of a future event you'd use the imperfect because your thinking about action that hasn't been completed.

But when the Old Testament prophets spoke of future events they used the perfect tense. That is faith. What God promises is as good as done because God always brings his promises to pass.

That's the kind of faith that Jacob had. And whoever you are and whatever situation you find yourself in, if you as a believer will simply trust God you'll mark yourself out as a hero in His eyes.

Adoniram Judson went to Burma as a missionary in the 1800's. He and his wife Ann faced unbelievable hardships and difficulties.

They studied the language 12 hours a day for three years before they tried to reach out to the people. They worked with Buddhist there for 6 years before they saw anyone respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the end of their 5th year there someone back home wrote and asked "How are the prospects of winning people to Christ in Burma." The answer of Judson was "The prospects are as bright as the promises of God."

Judson was a hero in God's hall of fame. He believed God's promise. God says, in Isaiah 55:11, *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

Amy Carmichael spent her life serving the Lord in India. At one point she came to grips with the possibility of remaining single the rest of her life.

These are her own words she wrote 40 years after that event. "I had feelings of fear about the future. The devil kept whispering to me 'It's all right now, but what about afterward? You are going to be very lonely,' and he painted pictures of loneliness."

"I turned to my God in desperation and said Lord what can I do? How can I go on to the end? And he said, None of them that trust in me shall be desolate. That word has been with me ever since. It has been fulfilled to me."

For 40 years Amy Carmichael stood on the promise of God and claimed it's truth. Along with writing 35 published books she started an organization that saved thousands of young girls from forced prostitution. She dressed in Indian clothes, dyed her skin with dark coffee, and often traveled long distances on India's hot, dusty roads to save just one child from suffering.

She was a hero of the faith.

God is looking for more candidates for his hall of fame. He's looking for those who will take the promises of God and believe them. Just simply believe them as they relate to their personal lives.

You need to know and memorize the promises of God. You can't claim them as being as good as fulfilled if you don't know what they are.

Know the promises of God and when trouble comes you'll have something to see you through. Make a habit of living your life day by day leaning on the promises of God.

Allan McRae says "Our problem is that we tend to put question marks after God's promises when we should put periods!"

Wherever God puts a period, don't put a question mark.

God spoke and Jacob believed. God promised the land. So Jacob makes Joseph promise to bury him there.

Now if we just read over Hebrews 11:21 without reading Genesis chapter 48, we might think that the writer of Hebrews was describing just one event.

But in Genesis 48 we find out that this blessing of Joseph's sons took place just after Jacob worshipped in faith.

The flip side of that is, if we just read Genesis and not Hebrews we might miss how significant God counts what happened at this point.

Because of this act of blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob is listed in God's hall of fame. And so we have to ask what's so significant about that?

- I. To Be God's Hero We Need To Claim God's Promises As Being As Good As Fulfilled*
- II. To Be God's Hero We Need To Accept The Providence Of God In Spite Of All Appearances*

Read Genesis 48:1-6

Here Jacob adopts the two sons of Joseph that were born to him in Egypt. Out of Jacob's sons come all the families of Israel and so he brings Joseph's sons into the promise.

Actually there weren't 12 tribes in Israel but 13. There is no tribe of Joseph even though he was one of Jacob's 12 sons. Instead there is a tribe of Ephraim and a tribe of Manasseh.

Reuben was actually the first born of Jacob and in line for the birthright. But Reuben committed incest and by that disqualified himself from the position as first born. Joseph, even though he was the 11th of the 12, was God's sovereign choice for first born and God, through Jacob, gives him that blessing.

One part of the oriental birthright was a double portion of the family inheritance so when Jacob adopts the two sons of Joseph he's giving Joseph a double portion among the tribes of Israel.

Now remember, Joseph's two sons were for all practical purposes Egyptians. They were born in Egypt to an Egyptian mother and their father was the second highest official in Pharaoh's court.

These guys had the world at their fingertips.

They had everything that Egypt had to offer to look forward to but Joseph had no goals for his sons in Egypt. All that was put aside to be part of Israel.

Joseph's goals for his sons were spiritual goals.

What kind of goals do you have for your children? Is your most important goal, I hope they can get a good education, a good job and make a good living? Or is it, I pray that their lives honor Jesus Christ above everything else no matter what their education or how much money they make.

How about the two sons? They gave up more than we can even imagine to identify themselves with people who were an abomination to the Egyptians. We don't read about one word of protest from them. Only obedience.

That says something about their upbringing, doesn't it?

But the real focus is this blessing given to the children. What is so special about it?

Read verses 13 & 14

Joseph brings his two boys over and directs Manasseh to Jacob's right hand. He was the oldest. He was in line for the place of honor at the right hand.

But, Jacob crosses his hands in front of him and puts the left on the eldest and the right on the youngest instead.

Joseph saw what was happening and tried to uncross his father's hands but Jacob refused.

Read verse 19

This blessing is confirmed in the Bible. By the time the nation of Israel is divided is divided into 2 kingdoms in the 10th century BC the northern part is called Ephraim.

Now, we are not told how, but in some way God communicated to Jacob that the blessing was to go to the youngest rather than the oldest.

And the significant thing is that Jacob obeyed God, and so God placed Jacob in His hall of fame because by faith Jacob blessed the younger.

That might not seem like such a big deal to us but in that culture and that time, such a thing was against all custom.

Jacob dared to trust God and believe that God's plans were best. He dared to accept the providence of God in spite of all appearances, in spite of the fact that he was going against deeply ingrained custom. In spite of the fact that he was going against the wishes of his beloved son Joseph.

You know God is still looking for the same type of people today. He is looking for people who recognize His sovereign position in the universe and His sovereign working in our individual lives.

He is looking for people who accept the things of life as coming from His hand even though they look otherwise. He is looking for people who accept his providential working without complaining and rebelling but who rest in simple faith in Him.

That is a hero in God's book. Are you rejoicing in the things that God has for you?

- I. *To Be God's Hero We Need To Claim God's Promises As Being As Good As Fulfilled*
- II. *To Be God's Hero We Need To Accept The Providence Of God In Spite Of All Appearances*
- III. *To Be God's Hero We Need To Show Faith In The Coming Of The Lord*

Genesis 49 verses 1 -7

Reuben tried to take over the family and run the show. He committed incest. And so Jacob predicts, *unstable as water, you shall not excel*. And the tribe of Reuben never did excel. Reuben himself lost the birthright and the Reubenites excelled in nothing.

Next he dealt with Simeon and Levi. They had been cruel murders. And so Jacob speaking by the Holy Spirit said, *I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel*.

Levi's story was different than Simeon's. When Moses said *Whoever is on the LORD'S side--come to me*.in Exodus 32:26 the tribe of Levi stepped forward. So the Levites became the priests of the nation. They were scattered among the tribes without their own property, but because of their stand for God their scattering became a blessing.

Then Jacob came to Judah. And this is where we see the 3rd characteristic of a hero. Judah had some shady things in his back ground as well. But Judah had repented of those things and now they were forgotten. Jacob proceeds to give both an evaluation of Judah and more than that, a statement of the future of the tribe of Judah.

Read verses 8 - 10

Judah was to be praised. His name comes from the verb *yadah* and it means "he shall be praised."

That his hand will be on the neck of his enemies shows power. He is compared to a young lion in courage and strength. But verse 10 is really the keynote of this prediction.

The scepter (which is a sign of kingly authority) shall not depart from Judah. Judah won't lack a man to sit on the throne of Israel.

The word translated "law giver" can mean either "law giver" or the "staff of a law giver."

And since it is used here parallel to "scepter" the best translation is "nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" which is the way ancient monarchs sat.

The authority and the dominion and the preeminence is given to the tribe of Judah.

What happened in Israel's history? The first judge in Israel came from Judah. The first king in Israel chosen by God, King David, came from Judah. Judah was first when Israel marched through the wilderness.

Preeminence was given to Judah. But why? Because this all leads up to something. It will all continue until "Shiloh" comes.

Hengstenberg in his *Christology of the Old Testament* says "Shiloh is the name of the redeemer derived from the verb which means 'to rest.' It has an adjective signification and means "the man of rest" as in "the prince of peace."

Notice, to Him shall be the obedience of the people.

Judah and the tribe to follow would not lose the dominion until he attains his highest place in his descendant - Shiloh. And all nations ultimately will render obedience to Shiloh.

Interestingly the Jewish view of this passage was always messianic.

The LXX, the Talmud (a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs, and history), the targums (Aramaic translations of the Hebrew Bible) all took this as speaking of Messiah. So did the Samaritan Pentateuch, so did the

early Christian church fathers.

See Shiloh is Jesus Christ. He's the only one who can say *Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*(Matthew 11:28) He's the king of kings, the prince of peace and the ruler of all nations.

What tribe was Jesus from? The tribe of Judah.

When we come to Jesus Christ in faith with our burden of sin, he lifts it and gives us rest.

Jacob not only claimed the promises of God and accepted the providence of God but he also gave testimony to the anticipation of the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

And that 's the 3rd thing that marks out God's heroes.

By their life, by their actions, by their priorities, they anticipate the coming of Christ. Jacob didn't know all the details, but he knew a redeemer was coming.

Two thousand years ago He came. His name was Jesus and He came to be our substitute. He came to take our place at the cross and take our punishment on Himself. All who put their trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins find rest.

But the Bible says He's coming again. The first time He came to suffer and die. The next time He comes it will to rule and reign over planet earth. He'll come as The lion of the tribe of Judah. The King of Kings. He'll have the scepter.

Are you looking for His return? Are you looking for what the Bible calls, *the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ?* (Titus 2:13)

See God's hall of fame isn't reserved for some superhuman group who have abilities that go far beyond yours and mine.

God's hall of fame is made up of ordinary men and women, boys and girls who believe God and claim His promises as being as good as fulfilled. Who accept the providence of God in their lives joyfully giving God the glory. And who are eagerly waiting for the coming of the Lord. For the kingdom of God to be established.

God's heroes aren't those who just know the facts of God's promises and His power

and the nearness of His coming. God's heroes are people whose life is actually shaped by those things.

Are you a hero for God this morning? You can be. By God's grace and by his strength you can be.