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We resume our study now in Genesis with the life of Joseph and in concluding chapter 47. There's one final point I would like to make about Joseph's treatment of the people in the land because it can seem somewhat harsh. I mentioned in the first session this morning that it was not considered to be harsh by the people.

They thought it was a great deal. They thanked Joseph for it. You have saved our lives.

We will be Pharaoh's servants and so forth. Verse 25 of Genesis 47. But it does bring us to the concept of biblical charity.

In what way do you help someone who is in need? Even though these people are in dire straits, they have already paid all of their money, they have mortgaged all of their animals, they have sold virtually everything that they have, Joseph does not give something for nothing. And it is a principle worth investigating. Turn with me to Leviticus chapter 25 to see what the law of Moses had to say on this score.

Leviticus chapter 25 and verse 25. I couldn't read my own writing there. I couldn't tell if that was a 15 or a 25, but it's 25-25.

You can go back to verse 23 there in Leviticus 25. The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is mine. You are strangers and sojourners with me, God says.

And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land. If one of your brethren becomes poor and has sold some of his possession, and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it, then he may redeem what his brother sold. So this was a provision in the Israelite economy that if you got too poor, you could sell your land for cash to pay your debts or to meet your needs, and then someone could come back and redeem that land, pay back the purchase price.

If the man has no one to redeem it, but he himself becomes able to redeem it, let him count the years since its sale and restore the remainder to the man to whom he sold it, that he may return to his possession. If he is not able to have it restored to himself, then what was sold shall remain in the hand of him who bought it until the year of Jubilee. In the Jubilee it shall be released and it shall be returned to his possession.

We talked about this before with someone who owned a house in a walled city and so on. But if you realize the fact that God made provision both for slavery and for... Slavery really has so many bad connotations in our language, but you may recall the idea of indentured servitude that took place. A lot of people who came over to America in the early days of our republic were indentured, and we learned what manumission was, and we learned about what it meant to serve for seven years, to pay off a debt that would finance your trip to America and that kind of thing.

It really turned out to be the only way that some people could better themselves was to use that as a means of getting through a tough time or making a big change. And the Bible makes provision for those things. It never sanctions cruelty.

It never sanctions abuse. But slavery is never condemned in the Bible. It's condemned a lot more in our society than it ever is in the Bible.

In fact, there's no place in the Old Testament or in the New where slavery is declared to be evil. Jesus never took the disciples down to the slave market and turned over the tables and released the slaves. If we had half the sensitivity and sense of outrage about the merchandising of the Gospel that goes on today, as Jesus did in His day, that we have regarding slavery, we could reform a lot of things in the church.

Psalms 41 and verse 1, Blessed is he who considers the poor. The Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive, and he will be blessed on the earth.

He will not deliver him to the will of his enemies. We should have a disposition to help those who are in need. Psalm 112 verse 9, The righteous individual who is being described in this psalm, you go up to verse 5, A good man deals graciously and lends.

He will guide his affairs with discretion. Notice even though he's gracious and lends, his actions are characterized by discretion. He doesn't just give graciously and lend to everyone who comes down the pike or anybody who holds up a cardboard sign or stands there on one leg and looks pathetic.

He will guide his affairs with discretion. Surely he will never be shaken. The righteous will be in everlasting remembrance.

He will not be afraid of evil tidings. His heart is steadfast, trusting in the Lord. His heart is established.

He will not be afraid until he sees his desire upon his enemies. He has dispersed abroad. He has given to the poor.

His righteousness endures forever and his horn will be exalted with honor. There is eternal fruit that is produced when we are generous to those in need. In Proverbs chapter 3 verse 27 and 28, the principle is expressed, Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due.

When it is in the power of your hand to do so, do not say to your neighbor, Go and come back and tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you. And we talked about this in some detail last time. But the point is, we talk about the priority in our own lives of being a place where God is at work, that God is transforming our souls.

We are being transformed by the renewing of our minds. We are placing ourselves on the altar as living sacrifices according to Romans 12. And in some circles when we make that a priority and we concentrate on the study of the Word of God and on the cultivation of our own spiritual growth, it has led to insensitivity.

There have been churches who were exegetical in their approach and expository in preaching where people take notes and go verse by verse, book by book, that wind up being somewhat cold and not sensitive to need and not ready and willing and generous of spirit. And we want to recognize that there should be, if our intake of the Word of God is what it should be, and if it's not only being taken in but being processed, I think where we tend to not have an outworking or not tend to have an application is where we concentrate on intake even to the exclusion of digestion. If you eat and eat and eat and eat and could not digest anything, you'd have terrible results internally.

And spiritually the same thing can take place. We've had groups of believers, we've been part of groups of believers in the past in some cases where everything is about intake. You measure your spirituality by your intake.

How many times did you attend Bible class and did you take notes? Can you talk the talk and understand the vocabulary and so forth? It's kind of like what Paul said when he was talking about tongues. He said, I would rather speak five words with my understanding, have my mind and my soul engaged than to hear a whole sermon in tongues. Well, if we don't meditate, if we don't think about and apply the things that we see in the Word of God, and if they don't work themselves out in our life, we might as well go be charismatic and speak in tongues because the end result is the same.

You don't have what has been called the metabolism of the Word of God. It doesn't get digested and become a part of the fabric of our soul. And that's really the point.

I have observed in the past, I've been privileged to have as friends people who were not great students of the Word of God in the sense of going to every book of the Bible and knowing where things were and knowing a lot of details about individual passages and doctrines and so forth. But the things that they did know about integrity and honor and putting the Lord first were a part of their daily life. And I suspect that many of those people have produced far and away more fruit than some of us who are big, deep exegetes of the Word and yet have more trouble in making a priority out of application.

And it is a chastening example in my mind that it is not enough to go into Greek and Hebrew and figure things out in the Scriptures if it does not produce a change in the way we treat one another, in the way we speak to one another, in the way we live our lives before God. And so when we look at these passages on biblical charity as we did last time and again this time, it isn't a knee-jerk reflex. It's not a rule to follow.

You see someone in need, you help someone in need. This is a description of someone

who already has a soul conditioned to love. And how does our soul become conditioned to function in love? It's through concentrating on hope and concentrating on faith.

We can't will ourselves to have love. We can't will ourselves to be generous of spirit and self-sacrificing of nature. It has to be a transformation that God works within us.

What we can do is decide to be faithful. We can decide to be obedient. We can decide to spend time in meditation and in prayer so that God has room to do His work in our souls.

We get out of the way and let Him produce that fruit within us. But we cannot decide directly that we're going to be more loving this week. I'm going to have a more generous spirit.

People try that all the time and fail because it's not something that comes by decision. It comes by transformation. We can decide to be transformed.

We can concentrate on our transformation, but we want to see that that works itself out and that when we do see opportunities, we exercise that love that is shed abroad in our hearts by God the Holy Spirit. In Isaiah 58, verses 6 and 7, again, I'm reviewing some of these that we looked at before, but it's one thing to look at a passage and say, well, that's what the Bible says. And it's something else to think about it in terms of what we ourselves can do.

Isaiah 58, verse 6, is this not the fast that I have chosen to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke? Rather than fasting in an outward form as the Pharisees and others did in Jesus' day where it was all to be seen by men, to impress others with spirituality or holiness, the fast that God condones, the fast that pleases God, the one that He has chosen, is to loose bonds of wickedness, undo heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, and break every yoke. Well, this is a fast. What is the nature of a fast? It's self-denial, isn't it? You go without something that you think you really need.

I really need this meal. I really need this high fat, high sugar, high calorie, good tasting, greasy, fried meal that appeals to me on six different levels. But when we fast, the true concept of biblical fasting was to set aside normal things and even needful things to make a conscious priority out of the things of God.

When Jesus went into the wilderness for forty days and did not eat, that was a fast. And it was a fast because He was pursuing the will of the Father. He was at the inception of His earthly ministry and seeking God early in that sense was more important than His necessary food.

And, of course, you remember that psalm that David talks about the fact that I have desired Your Word more than my necessary food. We sometimes think, well, I don't have time for this or I don't have time for that. It's crowding my day.

In terms of physical exercise, I was talking to people recently and they were saying, well, you know, all that exercise stuff sounds good, but I just don't have time. Well, the guy that has written a book we've been reading, he says, well, it isn't that you don't have the time. It's that you don't make the time.

And the reason you don't make the time is that it's not a high enough priority. If it's a high enough priority, you make the time. People that like a particular TV show, they make the time.

They will be sure that they're at home in front of the TV at nine o'clock on Sunday night to watch the practice or whatever. If you really want to see something, or they'll tape it. They'll set the VCR.

If they want to see the making of the band or something, well, they'll tape it. Whatever it may be. People that like this island show where people get kicked off, maybe they have to be somewhere where they'll tape it and find out who got kicked off the island this week.

I will confess to you, I can understand all these other shows I've mentioned, but that thing about the people on the island, I just can't figure that out. Why is that interesting? I don't know. But the point is, when God says this is the fast that I have chosen, and He doesn't say deny yourself a meal.

He doesn't even say go without something so that you can study the Word of God. What does He say? He says, loose the bonds of wickedness. Undo the heavy burdens.

Let the oppressed go free. What situation pertained in Israel that this would apply to? What is being spoken of here in Isaiah? What are the bonds of wickedness? People can be put in impossible situations by wicked leadership. There could be people in positions of power in local government who oppress and who overtax and who put people in a situation where they don't have any good options and it's really not any fault of their own, but they have been put in an impossible situation by people and we can come to relief.

People can be put in an impossible situation by circumstances and we can provide relief. Sometimes it requires self-sacrifice. Maybe it requires resources or it requires time or it requires effort.

But the bonds that have been put on somebody by wickedness, by someone else's bad deeds, by someone else's bonds or burdens that have been placed on people, heavy burdens that you need another shoulder under that burden. To let the oppressed go free, to give somebody relief. There are people who, for example, take care of an invalid relative like a mother or father or something in their house or they take care of a child that's handicapped or whatever day in and day out, day in and day out.

And it's something they do willingly and they love the person that they're caring for. But it's a wonderful thing to be able to free someone from that, even for a day or two, to give them the chance to get out and breathe, to let the oppressed go free to whatever extent that we're able to do that. And breaking every yoke.

What is a yoke? A yoke is something that puts you in harness to drag a heavy plow through rocky soil. A yoke is something where you're dragging a heavy burden day after day. And to break the yoke is another picture of setting free someone who is entangled.

We talk about being entangled in the yoke of bondage of legalism in the New Testament and Galatians. Paul says, Do not be entangled in the yoke of bondage. There's social bondage.

People put expectations and pressure on people to conform and to produce and to be and to do certain things. And we can be guilty of being a part of that culture or a part of that mindset that puts expectations and false standards on people and we can break those yokes. We can set people who are oppressed free.

But all of these things, if you think about it, this is an outward-looking perspective. It's not, well, am I in a yoke? Am I in bondage? Am I oppressed? Am I a victim? To have this attitude to fast the fast that God has chosen is to be looking around at others and looking for places to break the yokes, looking for places, seeing opportunities to free the oppressed. And the great thing about it is you have to be objective to do this.

If you're subjective and you have your eyes on yourself and your eyes on your own problems and your own cloistered set of difficulties, this is a fast. This is, even though you have difficulties, even though this works a hardship, you do it anyway because you're putting the benefit of someone else ahead of your own benefit. Is it not, in verse 7, to share your bread with the hungry and that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out? Here are some specific examples of the principle in the previous verse.

Here's someone who's hungry and has no bread. Will you share your bread with them? You bring to your house the poor who are cast out. When you see the naked, you cover them and you do not hide yourself from your own flesh.

What is the condemnation? Do you remember the sheep and the goats judgment that Jesus spoke of? He said when the Son of Man comes into His kingdom and He puts the sheep on His right and the goats on His left, and to the sheep He says, Come thou, blessed of My Father, into the kingdom that has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world. Why? Because when I was hungry, you fed Me. When I was naked, you clothed Me.

When I was sick and in prison, you visited Me. A visit doesn't mean, Hi there, I just came by for a visit. To visit, this is like when God visited Israel with deliverance, with benefit.

And it goes right back to passages like this. This is an attitude. It is a reflection of the nature of God Himself to share with those who are less fortunate to house those who have been cast out, to clothe the naked, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh.

These are people with whom there is a relationship. You don't have to go out and track them down and find them. These are people that you encounter.

It answers the question that Jesus answered when He told the parable of the Good Samaritan. Who is My neighbor? When Jesus says, You shall love your neighbor as yourself, who is your neighbor? It doesn't say that the Samaritan had an ongoing ministry supported by love gifts of going around the highways and byways and looking for people in the ditch. But as he was traveling and saw someone in the ditch, that's an opportunity.

Now that man is his neighbor where five minutes earlier he was not. And so we have plenty of opportunities in our normal experience. We don't have to start a ministry.

We don't have to become a non-profit organization and get a website and all that. All we have to do is live our normal life and watch for the opportunities that God brings, not hide ourselves from our own flesh. Many of our opportunities are right within the body of Christ.

What is the result? Verse 8, Your light shall break forth like the morning, your healing shall spring forth speedily, and your righteousness shall go before you. Here's a person that's not yet healed up. People like to talk about being wounded and broken and all that, and I try to avoid that language because it starts giving me feelings of nausea.

But there is the idea that we have problems of our own, but we don't wait until all of our problems are solved before we look to see if we can be of assistance in the problems of others. And what God says is if you're objective, if you see when your own flesh is in need, if you see when your own neighbor is in need and take advantage of opportunities to help in a sacrificial way, which is what the fast implies, He says your light will break forth like the morning. The light that you need is going to break forth.

The healing that you need is going to come. At the very point that you stop pursuing your own light and your own solutions and your own aid and have that idea of being generous to others, your own light, your own healing, and your own righteousness is going to catch up with you. And the glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.

It's a wonderful picture because you have light before you and you have the glory of the Lord behind you. And you have your healing and your righteousness right there with you. Verse 9, Then you shall call and the Lord will answer.

You shall cry and He will say, Here I am. This is after we've made this decision, after we've set this priority and made this our policy. Why? It goes along with, it's a corollary

to the idea that unless we forgive one another, we are not forgiven.

Sometimes there may be people that we might think have done us wrong or something. And if we have not forgiven them, then we are not forgiven. If we have forgiven them, then we're going to be able to be generous.

We're going to be able to undo the heavy burdens and let the oppressed go free and so forth. And some of that oppression can be sort of a grudge bearing or holding over someone's head the fact that at some time or another they malfunctioned. That's what he's talking about in verse 9. If you take away the yoke from your midst, the pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness, constantly bringing up some failure.

Sometimes people almost hate it to be around someone who knows their past because all of the stuff that you just assumed went away gets brought back up. And we can't control what other people do, but we certainly can control ourselves. We don't have to be the first ones to point out a flaw or an anomaly.

The pointing of the finger and speaking wickedness. If instead you extend your soul to the hungry and satisfy the afflicted soul, what are we doing here? Instead of dwelling on failures and weaknesses and past things, we're looking for opportunities to be a blessing and be a benefit. Extend your soul to the hungry.

Satisfy the afflicted soul. Your light will dawn in the darkness and your darkness will be like noonday. Your worst times in life are going to be like noonday for someone else.

The Lord will guide you continually. People say, well, how can I get a hold of divine guidance? How can I have God guiding and directing in my life? Well, concentrate on being a benefit to others. Scripture says, The Lord will guide you continually and satisfy your soul in drought.

Strengthen your bones. You'll be like a watered garden and like a spring of water whose waters do not fail. Those from among you will build the old waste places.

You'll raise up the foundations of many generations and you will be called the repairer of the breach. Remember what Jesus said in the Beatitudes? Blessed are the peacemakers, the restorer of streets to dwell in. And this leads us rather elegantly to our memory verse for this morning which comes from Jeremiah 17.

Verses 7 and 8. Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord and whose hope is the Lord. For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters which spreads out its roots by the river and will not fear when heat comes. The heat coming is the same as the darkness.

It will be like the noonday. Or being satisfied in your soul even when there's a drought. Her leaf will be green and will not be anxious in the year of drought.

Nor will it cease from yielding fruit. It's a wonderful promise. And we see the connection between trusting in the Lord and having the Lord as our hope.

This is the means by which how can we become people of generous spirit? How can we become people who recognize a need in the lives of others and are able to fill it and to be a blessing? It's by concentrating on faith and hope. That process of meditating and remembering who we are and why we're here in God's plan, the things that God has done for us, getting our vision off of ourselves and on to the Lord and then on to others. There's a lot being said and bandied about as far as self-esteem and self-love.

There was some song that came out a few years ago and I've mercifully forgotten almost all of it. I think Whitney Houston or somebody sang it about the greatest love and the earth is love for yourself. And it's just a satanic pit of hell song if you ask me.

Because the greatest love is love for God followed by love for others. And that's exactly what these Scriptures teach us. If you love the Lord your God with all your heart, you're going to trust Him.

You're going to make Him your hope. If you love your neighbor as yourself, you're going to be disposed to do all of the things that are spoken of here in Isaiah 58. And you don't have to worry about love of self.

That's our problem. Pride and arrogance, all this self-esteem business that they're trying to build up, little kids in school and so forth. Oh, we don't want to discipline them because it might hurt their self-esteem.

Self-esteem is our biggest problem. We've got way too much of it. And I completely don't understand that whole line of thinking.

And you can see the results of it because people are just growing up and running amok. So I wanted to revisit Isaiah 58 in particular because this is the fast that God has chosen. This is a great form of worship is to be generous.

And we're seeing this in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus is sending out His disciples to heal and to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom. It is a reflection of the character of God. It's a reflection of the plan and purpose of God.

They don't take an extra staff. They don't take money. They don't take a suitcase.

They don't take a little AWOL bag. They don't take an extra heavy-duty pair of sandals. Why? It's a symbolic manifestation of the fact that their hope is the Lord.

Their trust is in the Lord for their provision. And when they go and accomplish this purpose that Jesus has given them to preach the Kingdom and to be a blessing, to alleviate suffering and sickness, God is going to supply all their needs according to His

riches in glory. And then finally, Ezekiel 18.

This is where you get the oft-quoted passage about the just living by his faith. Ezekiel 18, verse 5. If a man is just and does what is lawful and right, if he has not done all of these sinful things, you go down to verse 7. If he has not oppressed anyone, but has restored to the debtor his pledge, has robbed no one by violence, but has given his bread to the hungry and covered the naked with clothing, if he has not charged interest nor taken any increase, but has withdrawn his hand from iniquity and executed true judgment between man and man. And again, we have the emphasis on the fact that this is done with discretion.

We can make a rule out of generosity. Any need I see, I'm going to fill it. Any flyer I get in the mail where they're asking for money, I'll write a check.

Anybody I see on the curb, I'm going to hand them a 5 or a 20. Any need that I see, that's not the case. We are to execute true judgment between man and man.

We need to have discernment and good stewardship. We are not just running faucets of mercy just like the Lord God is not. God does not dispense blessing and provision on every single person in the human race.

He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. There is potential there. But you notice rain is not sustenance.

Rain gives you the potential to grow a crop and take advantage of what's available. But the rain itself is not enough to sustain anyone. But the potential is there.

We can provide opportunity and potential for people. But just like Joseph, it's not just here we are, the big charity wagon. Here we are, the big benevolent give-all to everyone with no condition, with no judgment, no discernment.

I think the welfare reform that we have in this country is a good thing to try to encourage people to go to work and to sustain themselves. In the long run, it's much better for them than just meeting an immediate need. So, if he walks in God's statutes in verse 9, has kept my judgments faithfully, he is just, he surely shall live, says the Lord God.

And once again, this he shall live is life in the sense of fullness and fulfillment of potential. So, we want to have a balanced approach. We want to understand what Scripture says, what the concept of biblical charity is.

We should be generous of spirit. We should be alert and willing when opportunities arise. But it is not without discretion.

It's not without discernment. It needs to be a reflection of the same character and the same grace that God exercises, that God exhibits toward us. Okay, well, I think we're

ready to move forward.

We'll actually leave chapter 47 now in the last few verses. Verse 27, Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt in the country of Goshen, and they had possessions there, and grew and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt 17 years, so the length of Jacob's life was 147 years.

When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, Now, if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers. You shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.

And he said, I will do as you have said. Then he said, Swear to me. So he swore to him.

So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed. There are parallels in what Jacob says here to early episodes in the patriarchal stories of Genesis. As soon as we see Jacob say, place your hand under my thigh, what does that remind us of? When's the last time we had someone make that request? It goes all the way back to Abraham when he's commissioning his servant to look for a wife for his son Isaac.

And he calls his servant in chapter 24. And Abraham said to the oldest servant of his house who ruled over all that he had, Please put your hand under my thigh, and I will make you swear by the Lord, the God of heaven and the God of earth, that you will not take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites among whom I dwell, but you will go to my country and to my family and obtain a wife for Isaac. And here, once again, this oath-taking is a powerful symbol.

When he places his hand under the thigh there, Deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt. This is fidelity to the promises of God.

Abraham made his servant swear because he was being true to what God had said. I will make of you a great nation. Not the Canaanites.

I'm not going to bring in the outside pagans that are in the land. It's your house, your seed that's going to be a blessing. And in the same way, Jacob knows that even though they are prospering and they have possessions and they're very comfortable down in Egypt, that's not where his offspring are going to reside forever.

And wouldn't it be a terrible thing to be buried down in Egypt and have Israel return to the promised land? Well, old Father Jacob, he's buried down in the delta region of Egypt. And his bones are planted. Obviously, his bones aren't going to know one way or another where he is.

But symbolically, when he tells Joseph, plant me back up in the land, it's a reminder that that's the ultimate destination for the people of God, for the descendants of Abraham.

And he says, we're fine here, but this is not my ultimate home and this is not where I want to be buried. And we, of course, have copious passages of Scripture that remind us that this world is not our home.

We used to have an old quartet song, this world is not my home, I'm just a-passin' through, my treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door and I can't feel at home in this world anymore. Even though God makes great provision for us here and blesses us here, this is not our ultimate destination.

Where are we going to consider our treasure to be and our ultimate destination? So, it's a powerful reminder that in that time of prosperity, in that time of blessing, the famine is over, they have possessions, they have a good job, they have comfortable living. Jacob says, don't get too comfortable. Bury me back up in the wilderness.

Bury me back up there with Abraham and Isaac. And it's not enough when Joseph says, I will do as you have said. He says, swear to me.

Jacob used this identical language a little bit earlier in our story. Do you remember where? Go back to Genesis chapter 27 when you have the episode of the birthright. In fact, you can go all the way back to chapter 25.

The twins struggle and so forth and Jacob and Esau grow up and in verse 29 of chapter 25 of Genesis, Jacob cooked a stew and Esau came in from the field. He was weary. Esau said, please feed me with some of that red stew.

I'm weary. Jacob said, sell me your birthright as of this day. He says, look, I'm about to die.

What is this to me? Jacob said, swear to me, in verse 33, as of this day. So, he swore to him and sold his birthright to Jacob. So, one of the first vignettes, one of the first scenes where we see Jacob, he's making his brother swear an oath to grant him the rights of the firstborn, the birthright.

And in one of the last scenes with Jacob, we see him saying swear to me to his son Joseph. And then it says he bowed himself on the head of the bed. Nobody knows what this means.

And I don't either. I don't know what that means. It says he bowed himself on the bed.

I have no clue. I can't even give you a suggestion. If something occurs to you, let me know.

But it says Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed. Was this an act of worship toward God? Did he pray? Did he, after having gathered himself and sat up to speak with

Joseph, sort of roll back over onto the bed? I just have no idea. I thought about it, thought about it.

I did research. Nobody knows what it means. There's no old custom or anything else.

There's no word worship in there? No. It just says he bowed himself on the head of the bed. So, I'm clueless.

I'm sure it's significant. I can't figure it out. Then, in chapter 48, it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, Indeed, your father is sick.

So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Manasseh, of course, is the firstborn. Ephraim is the younger.

Jacob was told, Look, your son Joseph is coming to see you. So Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. Of course, he's getting ready to perform a blessing, as we know if we read on down a little bit.

It reminds us of Isaac. Before Isaac was going to perform the blessing for Esau, what did he do? He sent Esau out to get him a big meal to kind of perk him up. Give him his famous meal, his favorite meal.

This probably provided him with a little extra energy to be able to sit up and perform the blessing. So you get the idea that he's really in a bad way here. Maybe he drank something or ate something to gather himself together for this.

The other thing to note here in the first two verses of chapter 48 is Joseph is not living among his people. He is still down by Pharaoh's palace performing his duties as vizier of Egypt. He's not living in Goshen.

How do we know that? Because Joseph was told, Indeed, your father is sick. And he had to make a journey taking with him his two sons to go to Jacob. And in verse 2, Jacob was told, Look, your son Joseph is coming to you.

So this was a journey of some distance. And as grateful and as excited as Joseph was to see his father and have all his brothers come down and live in Egypt, he did not go live with them. And you see the wisdom and the sense of duty that Joseph has that he doesn't abandon the position that God has assigned him in the government of Egypt.

Even after the famine is over, he is still down there performing his duties, administering the nation. And he doesn't go and join his family in Goshen. There are some perhaps symbolic overtones in this when you think of the comparison between Joseph and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And you think about the family of Jacob as the Israelites. You think about Egypt as the Gentiles or even the church. Those where Joseph is first elevated to power among and is

in effect their king, second only to Pharaoh, who is the father to the people and so forth.

And the first identity, even though Jacob is the father of Joseph, even though Joseph belongs to that family, the new identity that he takes on in Egypt takes precedence over his association with his family. And he continues to function in that capacity in Egypt rather than going back to the status that he enjoyed before as being the favored son among brothers with Jacob. And there are some similarities in the career of the Lord Jesus Christ that are worthy of note.

But once Joseph appears with his two sons, in verse 3, Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz. We know that Luz is the old name for Bethel. In the land of Canaan and blessed me.

By calling it Luz, this harks back to the first appearance of God to Jacob at Bethel because that's before the name was changed, before Jacob renamed it and called it Bethel. In the land of Canaan he blessed me and said to me, Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you. I will make of you a multitude of people and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.

And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine. Just as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Now, this is quite a turn of events for a couple of reasons.

First of all, what is their order of birth? We're reminded of it in verse 1, Manasseh and Ephraim. But when Jacob speaks of them, he reverses their order and says, Ephraim and Manasseh. Puts the youngest or the younger of the two first.

And so he says, Your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt. We know that Joseph actually had other sons, but these were born before he came. He said, They are mine, just as Reuben and Simeon.

Who are Reuben and Simeon? That's the firstborn and secondborn to Jacob with Leah, his first wife. Just as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Now, this is particularly fascinating.

Turn with me quickly over to Leviticus 21. Then after you do that, turn back to Deuteronomy 21. Deuteronomy 21, verse 15.

If a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, is this Jacob's situation? Pretty much. Two wives, one loved and the other unloved. And they have borne him children, both the loved and the unloved.

And if the firstborn son is of her who is unloved, this is exactly Jacob's situation. Then it shall be on the day that he bequeaths his possessions to his sons, that he must not bestow firstborn status on the son of the loved wife in preference to the son of the

unloved, the true firstborn. But he shall acknowledge the son of the unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he is the beginning of his strength.

The right of the firstborn is his. So, what is Jacob doing here? Obviously, the law of Moses is some years in the future. But here, Jacob is taking Joseph, the firstborn son of the loved wife, and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and is putting them in the place of Reuben and Simeon, who are the firstborn sons of the unloved wife.

So, this is a momentous occasion. This is not just, oh, Joseph, you're a good kid and let me see my grandkids and I'm going to say good things about them. This is a legal transaction.

He is adopting Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons. This is a custom that has precedence. You find it in Egypt and in Ugarit, some of the ancient Near Eastern cultures.

A grandfather could adopt his grandsons and give them equal status with his sons. This is what Jacob is doing here. And it's quite a profound thing.

And once again, there are overtones, and I'll leave you to think about this in the coming week, with our standing as related to the Lord Jesus Christ. Although we were at one time far off from God, we were strangers to the covenants and the promises, without hope and without God in the world, as Paul says in the New Testament, we have been brought near by the blood of Christ. We have been made equal in the eyes of God in terms of relationship to Him and blessing and reward.

Israel is God's firstborn, but we have been made God's firstborn in a unique way, just as Jacob is doing here. So we'll have more to say about that next time, but the thing to remember is we have been given a lot. God has literally moved heaven and earth to give us the things that we have in Christ.

It is incumbent on us to remember that day by day and to live in that light, to look for opportunities to be generous to others, to look for opportunities to reflect the character of God in our own lives. This is where we'll have to stop for this morning and we'll resume in chapter 48 next time. Father, we thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word.

We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, cause us not only to understand, but to see the application of these things in our lives on a daily basis. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.