**Lesson 25**

**4-5 April 2022**

**Genesis 48-50**

***Another Perspective*: Malachi**

**Timeline and Map –** Malachi is the last of the twelve minor prophets, both timewise and in the order of books in the Bible. In fact, his is the very last book of the Old Testament. So write his name on blank #12 on the timeline sheet. The date of his ministry is approximately 460 b.c. He lived and prophesied in Judah, so draw a stickman somewhere in the territory of Judah on the map.

**Seeing Malachi in Perspective –** Malachi’s ministry took place nearly a hundred years after the decree of Cyrus that allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, and about 80 years after Haggai and Zechariah had encouraged the people to complete the temple. The people of his day were very discouraged. Even though they had been allowed to return to Judah, they had no Davidic king, and Judah itself was just one very small province within the Persian Empire (which spread from Egypt all the way back to the Euphrates River). They were experiencing economic difficulties due to drought and crop failures, and they were in spiritual decline as well.

**His Message –** As always, it is the Word of the Lord that revives the spirit, and Malachi begins his book describing his message as “the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi”. And nearly *half* of the verses in his book include phrases like “says the Lord of hosts”! This particular description of God would have been reassuring to the Israelites because they had no army of their own. But hearing from “the Lord of hosts” reminded them that God is in command of a huge heavenly host of angels that stood ready to defend Judah. They were not alone or defenseless.

**“My Messenger” –** Malachi’s name means “my messenger,” and this is significant to part of his message. Malachi 3:1 says, “Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.” This prophecy was fulfilled some 400 years later in the person of John the Baptist. John prepared the way before Jesus Christ, who did come to the temple during His earthly ministry. So God used one messenger, Malachi, to encourage His people with word of another messenger, who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

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**Jen Wilkin, *God of Covenant* video #10: *The Deaths of Jacob and Joseph***

**Review** – We are finally at “the end of the book of beginnings”! In Genesis 47, it sounded like Jacob was about to die, but he didn’t actually die until “sometime after that,” as the beginning of chapter 48 tells us.

**Twelve Sons, Twelve Landed Tribes –** Jacob had twelve sons, and when the Israelites finally gained their inheritance in the land of Canaan, there were twelve tribes who received allotments of land. But if you look at the two lists, you see that some of the names are different. The prophecies that Jacob speaks over his sons in chapters 48 and 49 shed light on this issue.

**“On Jacob’s Knees” –** Joseph is probably about 56 years old at this point in the narrative, so his boys are probably in their early 20’s. Genesis 48:12 says that Joseph took his two sons “from his father’s knees”, and we wonder how two strapping young men in their 20’s could sit on Jacob’s aged, feeble knees. But the phrase “on his knees” is a Hebrew idiom that means “on someone’s behalf”. We saw it used earlier in chapter 30 when Rachel gave her slave Bilhah to Jacob so that Rachel could gain a family through her; what Rachel actually said was “so that she can bear children on my knees”, i.e. on my behalf. So Moses is using the same language in this present passage to indicate that Jacob is legally adopting Joseph’s two sons as his own.

**Ephraim and Manasseh –** These two young men are half Israelite and half Egyptian. The two tribes that would bear their names are a kind of first fruits of God grafting Gentiles into His family. When Jacob spoke his blessing over them, he mentioned the name of God three times. He wanted these two young men, who had grown up in Egypt surrounded by many pagan gods, to know just Who Jacob was calling on to bless them: “the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked…the God who has been MY shepherd all my life…the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm…” may HE bless these boys. Jacob wanted Ephraim and Manasseh to know that this blessing comes from Yahweh.

**“God, My Shepherd” –** Genesis 48:15 is the first place in all of Scripture that God is referred to as a shepherd. Jacob himself was a shepherd, and it is interesting to see that he saw the God who had so faithfully watched over him in his times of failure and deceit as a shepherd. In speaking the blessings over these two young men, it seems that Jacob has finally come to submit himself to the One who makes the first last, and the last first.

**“God Will Be With You” –** This is a concept that has come to mean much to Jacob, and he wants to make sure that his offspring are aware of it as well. Way back in Genesis 28:15 God had said to Jacob, “I *am* with you and will watch over you wherever you go.” Then in 31:3 the Lord told Jacob to return to Canaan, saying, “…and I *will be* with you.” In 31:5 and 35:3 Jacob tells his family that God “*has been* with me.” Now in chapter 48 Jacob turns to his offspring and assures them that “God will be with you.”

**Jacob’s Blessings/Prophecies Concerning His Sons –** The blessings spoken when a father was about to die were considered to be prophetic. So let’s see what Jacob had to say about his sons.

* Jacob’s words to Reuben, his firstborn, make it clear that he is not to be forgiven for the way he insulted and dishonored his father by sleeping with one of his concubines. If you follow the biblical record, you find that Reuben had relatively few descendants and none who were noteworthy.
* Jacob’s words to Simeon and Levi recall that terrible day when they slaughtered all the men in Shechem. Neither of these two sons receives any favor from their father. Although the tribe of *Simeon* did receive an allotment of land when Joshua was in power, they gradually were absorbed into the other tribes. Eventually their allotment was completely surrounded by the territory of Judah. And the *Levites*, the priestly tribe, never received a portion of land. They were meant to be dispersed among all the other tribes.
* It is not surprising that the two longest blessings are reserved for Judah (who was in the line of Christ) and Joseph (who was a type of Christ). When we read what is said about Judah, we see glimpses of Christ. The reference to a scepter in verse 10 refers to royalty, and it is through Judah’s line that King David (and later our Messiah King, Jesus) will come. In fact, verse 10 can read, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until He comes to whom it belongs;” i.e. until the King of kings comes and takes His throne. The first half of verse 11 foreshadows Christ choosing to enter Jerusalem on the foal of a donkey, and the last half reminds us of the passage in Revelation that pictures Christ wearing a robe that has been dipped in blood.
* Scholars are not really sure how the prophecies concerning Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali played out in history.
* Jacob gives a lengthy blessing over Joseph, and he uses five different names of God in it: *the Mighty One of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, the God of your father,* and *the Almighty.* All of the things he says about Joseph can easily be applied to Jesus Christ. Of special note to us as women is that Jacob refers to “the breasts and the womb” as part of the blessing of the Almighty. The word or phrase translated as “the Almighty” is *El Shaddai*, which many scholars believe comes from the Hebrew word for breast. This wording suggests that God is our tender Nourisher. So there is something in our physicality as women and God’s image-bearers that speaks to the truth of who God is.

**Jacob’s Burial –** It was the custom of Jewish people of that time—and actually continues down to this day—that when someone dies, they are buried within 24 hours of their death. Since Jacob was in Egypt when he died, it would not have been possible under ordinary circumstances to honor his request to be buried in Canaan: his body would have decomposed long before his family could bring it back home. But in the sovereignty of God, Jacob died in the one place on earth that had made an art form of death. Egypt had an advanced method of embalming people that preserved their bodies indefinitely. In fact, you can still see the bodies of certain Egyptians that were embalmed during the period that we are reading about!

**The Brothers’ Fear and Joseph’s Response –** Joseph’s brothers were fearful after their father died, and they resorted to deception once again. They sent a message to Joseph, claiming that Jacob had commanded before he died that his older sons be forgiven for all the wrong they had done to Joseph. Joseph wept when he heard it and asked them a question that we all must deal with: “Am I in the place of God?” And he comforted them and promised to provide for them and their families.

**Am I in the Place of God? –** Many of us live year after year trying to be exactly that. We try to push ourselves into a place that is *only* suited for God. We look around and say, “I am the sovereign ruler of this universe. These children, they originated from me, and they will do exactly what I say they will do, and they will turn into the humans exactly that I want them to turn into. Not only that, but I *am* in the place of God. I am the one who is all-seeing. If there is anything I need to know, I will find it on my phone: I am omniscient! I am the one who judges and determines who is deserving of favor and who is not. Yes, I’m in the place of God! I think I’m qualified.” BUT GOD has a way of reminding us of our limitations. We should be grateful that a limitless God has set His favor upon us. We should trust that our limitless God *will* work all things together for our good. We may not see it in our lifetime: like Jacob, we may die in “Egypt”. Like Moses, we may not get to go into the “Promised Land”. We may not see the resolution of our personal plot line. But when we can say, “I do not need to sit in the place of God,” we can trust that He is, in fact, working these things together.

**The Impact on the Original Audience –** The Israelites of Moses’ day would have thrilled to hear the statement that Joseph made when he was dying about God coming to their aid one day and bringing them up out of the land of Egypt. They would have known about carrying the bones of Joseph out with them.

**Joseph’s Lifespan…and Ours –** In contrast to his immediate ancestors, Joseph lived to be only 110 years old. We may think that this doesn’t seem “fair”. Why not give the “good guy” a little longer? Enoch was another man who lived one of the shortest lives recorded in scripture but had by far the most righteous life. (See Genesis 5:21-24.) A short life lived well. Isn’t that what we want? Don’t we want to be able to say, whenever the Lord takes us, “I did my best with the time I had. I strove to live a life of righteousness. I strove to live like Christ.”

**Hebrews 11 “Hall of Faith” –** If you notice, the statements of faith listed in Hebrews chapter 11 follow the order of events and people mentioned in Genesis very closely. And then we come to verses 39 and 40: “All these were approved through their faith, but they did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for *us*, so that they would not be made perfect without *us*.” What does that mean? It means that all these Old Testament people saw only part of what you and I now look back on and see in full. We see the story of redemption from beginning to end. We can look at their stories and say, “Here is Christ…and here is Christ…and here is Christ.” When we celebrate the riches of redemption found in Christ, the stories of these Old Testament saints are brought to perfection.

**Therefore… –** But we need to go on to Hebrews 12:1. “Therefore, since we also have such a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us…” Witnesses such as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Joseph…all of the sons and all of their wives. But what are they witnessing? Is it us? Are they up in Heaven cheering us on? Perhaps they are—but the sense of the text in Hebrews is that all these people stand witness to the faithfulness of God through all generations. This cloud of witnesses is calling out to all of us, “This God Who said He will do it will surely do it.” Therefore, let US lay aside every weight and let US run with endurance the race before us, keeping our eyes on Jesus. ***Notice that Jesus despised the shame of the cross so that God might not be ashamed to be our God.***

**An Epitaph for Joseph –** In light of Hebrews 11, Jen Wilkin’s epitaph for Joseph is, “Here lies Joseph. This world was not worthy of him. An exile and a stranger, he is at last home.”

**The Book of Beginnings –** Genesis is the book of beginnings. It tells about the beginning of time, the beginning of the human race, the beginning of sin, the beginning of redemption, the beginning of the nation of Israel, and on and on and on. **But what has it begun in you?** What has it stirred in you? What has it shown you in a new light? It bears witness to the faithfulness of God to all generations. Therefore, how might you run? Know that “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it.”