

GENESIS 49:28-33 (JACOB BREATHED HIS LAST)

Introduction: When we talk about being "in" something, we mean that we are a part of it in an intimate way. If we are "in" the military, we are a part of the military. We are entitled to all of the benefits and the responsibilities that being in the military entails.

We are accountable to the line of authority in the military, and we are responsible for our conduct which is laid out in specific manuals which detail exactly what we should do, how we should act, even how we should cut our hair.

If one of us were in a rock band, everyone would identify us by that band. Our every action would be associated with the band collectively. And all of the fun things that go along with being in the band would fall on us individually, just as with every member.

This is what it means to be "in" something. It is as if we are fully immersed in it - as if we were to dive into the ocean and be completely covered by it. Today we'll look at how being "in" something, or someone, from a biblical perspective is more important than any other thing we could ever participate in.

Text Verse: "Precious in the sight of the LORD

Is the death of His saints.

¹⁶ O LORD, truly I *am* Your servant;

I *am* Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;

You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,

And will call upon the name of the LORD." Psalm 116:15-17

In our verses today, we will see the final moments of the life of Jacob. They are moments of a man who is living and dying in faith and in anticipation of great things to come in his future, even after his death. In other words, his hopes transcend this earthly existence and are rooted in a great reality, one which is eternal in nature.

The hope of Jacob is the hope of Messiah and the hope of Messiah is realized in the person of Jesus Christ. No other person can give us this hope, and to not be found in Him means a sad eternity awaits. But in Christ, there is hope which has its basis in God's sure word. And so let's turn to that precious and superior word again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Twelve Tribes of Israel (verse 28)

²⁸ All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel,

At the beginning of chapter 49, these words were recorded -

"And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:" Genesis 49:1

Since that verse, the blessings have been pronounced. Our first verse of today then shows the completion of the thought from verse 1. And here we see the first use of the term "the twelve tribes of Israel." In this case, it is what is known as a metonym.

A metonym is a word, name, or expression which is used as a substitute for something else with which it is closely associated. We use the term "Hollywood" when speaking of the film industry. We use the term "Washington" when speaking of the government.

In this case, the term, "the twelve tribes of Israel" is speaking of the tribes which will descend from these twelve sons who were just blessed. This wasn't a mistake, nor is it something that we should quickly pass over as if it were unimportant.

Instead it is a prophetic announcement that the son's descendants belong to the sons. They are "in" their fathers before them and those fathers in turn are "in" Jacob. And therefore we can see that the prophecy upon the sons is to be applied to the descendants. The two are inseparably linked.

From a biblical standpoint, we should ask, "Why is this important?" The answer is that the concept of being "in" someone in the Bible indicates being represented by them. In Hebrews 7, we read this about Levi being "in" Abraham who gave a tithe to someone named Melchizedek -

"Now consider how great this man *was*, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils. ⁵ And indeed those who are of the sons of Levi, who receive the priesthood, have a commandment to receive tithes from the people according to the law, that is, from their brethren, though they have come from the loins of Abraham; ⁶ but he whose genealogy is not derived from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the promises. ⁷ Now beyond all contradiction the lesser is blessed by the better. ⁸ Here mortal men receive tithes, but there he *receives them*, of whom it is witnessed that he lives. ⁹ Even Levi, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, so to speak, ¹⁰ for he was still in the loins of his father when Melchizedek met him." Hebrews 7:4-10

Time and again, the Bible uses this concept of being "in" someone to remind us that we are all descendants of Adam by blood and thus we are "in" Adam. This is why there are such meticulous genealogies recorded in both Testaments of the Bible.

It is to show the connection which goes all the way back to Adam who was created by God. When Adam sinned, we therefore sinned "in" Adam. Paul explains this in Romans 5:12 -

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." Romans 5:12

This is also one of the reasons why Jesus' two genealogies are listed, one in Matthew and one in Luke. It is proof that He is truly and fully human and thus qualified to be our representative for human matters. But He is also truly and fully God and therefore He can mediate our human matters with His infinite Father.

Such metonyms as "Adam" which represents all of mankind, and "the twelve tribes" which are represented by the twelve sons of Israel are constant reminders of the importance of Jesus Christ. The reason is that if we are "in" Adam, we are dead; we are spiritually disconnected from God. A transfer has to take place to reconcile this or we will be forever "in Adam."

The wonder of God's plan is that if we are found "in" Christ, then the spiritual connection is restored and thus life, eternal life, is also restored. Reading the words "the twelve tribes of Israel" here asks us to think on a completely different level than what the mere words sound like when they come off our lips.

Instead, the Bible is calling our attention to the grandeur of God's plans for the people of the world in these five simple words - "the twelve tribes of Israel." A beautiful example of this, right from Hosea will show us how God looks at us as being "in" someone.

At the beginning of Hosea 11, the Lord uses the singular when speaking of the people of Israel being called out of Egypt. Though singular, it is speaking of the whole. Here is how it is recorded -

"When Israel *was* a child, I loved him,
And out of Egypt I called My son." Hosea 11:1

However, just a few verses later, speaking of Ephraim, the younger son of Joseph and a single individual, look at how God views his descendents -

"I taught Ephraim to walk,
Taking **them** by **their** arms;
But **they** did not know that I healed **them**.
⁴ I drew **them** with gentle cords,
With bands of love,
And I was to **them** as those who take the yoke from **their** neck.
I stooped *and* fed **them**." Hosea 11:3, 4

Such terminology is everywhere in the Bible and it reminds us that we cannot change who we are. We are in our father, who is a son of Adam and

thus we are in Adam. There is nothing we can do about it... but God can. And so the admonition for us is, "O fallen son of Adam, come to Christ Jesus. He will make all things new."

28 (con't) and this is what their father spoke to them.

It is to these twelve sons that Jacob spoke his blessing, and he did so under the influence of the Spirit of God. The blessings were fulfilled in the descendants and they are also fulfilled in both the witness of the stars as well as in the precious pages of the Bible which testify to the work of God in Christ.

Only God who knows the future could have laid out the prophecies so exactly and specifically, and yet Moses records the words which say, "and this is what their father spoke to them." God's gracious hand was upon Jacob, directing him, and speaking through him as the two harmoniously blended into the sounds and words of prophecy.

As we saw during those twelve individual blessings, every line pointed to the work of God in Christ. It is amazing how carefully and meticulously everything has been laid out for this purpose.

28 (con't) And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing.

The twelve sons were blessed at this time, but prior to this, Jacob's two grandson's were adopted into the family and thus became independent tribes. Therefore, depending on how the tribes are listed, there often seems confusion in who the twelve tribes are. But there is none. Specific names are used at various times for specific reasons.

These twelve sons were blessed independently of Joseph's sons because they are those who are witnesses in the constellations which reveal God's plan. Later in Deuteronomy 33 during Moses' blessing, Simeon will be omitted and Ephraim and Manasseh will take place of Joseph.

In Numbers 2 when counting the tribes, Simeon will be retained, Levi will be omitted and Ephraim and Manasseh will again replace Joseph. And in Revelation, a different order will be used. Each time there are reasons for these changes, not errors or blunders, but wisdom and harmony as God unfolds His plan of the ages before our eyes.

*Wisdom is displayed in the pages of God's word
Every detail carefully selected to show us about Jesus
It is all about Him and He is our Lord
Surely God has so revealed these wondrous treasures to us*

*Search the pages! Look carefully through each line
There we see God's beautiful redemption plan
As if it were a feast, on every precious word we can dine
And see the splendor of how God became a Man*

*Redemption is found in Him, to Him let us look
Fixing upon Him our eyes, and thoughts, and heart
And searching diligently for Him in this precious book
To the Bible! To its message! To the wisdom it does impart*

II. The Cave of Machpelah (verses 29-32)

²⁹ Then he charged them

The word "charged" here in Hebrew is *tsavah*. It is a command or an order. It's the same word seen back in Genesis 2:16, 17 which records these ominous words, the first words ever spoken to man by God -

"And the LORD God **commanded** the man, saying, 'Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.'"

Mi kol ets ha-gan a-kol tochel, uh-me-ets ha-da-at tov va-ra, lo tochal mimenu ki beyom akholkha mimenu mowt tamut (2:44)

Like the commandment of God to Adam, Jacob is not asking, but is rather instructing. "This is what you are to do." It is of such importance to him, that they are spoken with the last breaths of his life. They must follow through with his words.

²⁹ (con't) **and said to them: "I am to be gathered to my people;**

His words are words of faith. To die is one thing. To say "I am returning to the dust" merely implies that we are a product of the ground under our feet and that we will again be a part of that same ground. But to say, "I am to be gathered to my people" implies that his people have not merely returned to the dust.

Instead, it is a form of anticipation that where his people are, there he will be as well. Whether you believe in evolution or creation, you are still acknowledging that your existence is a part of something more than just the dust. If evolution, then your people, like you are random chance - a god all its own.

But if you, like Jacob, believe in creation, then you are in essence returning to your God when you are gathered to your people. This is exactly what Solomon speaks of in the book of Ecclesiastes -

"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was,
And the spirit will return to God who gave it." Ecclesiastes 12:7

Jacob is voicing faith in his Creator by saying that he will be gathered to his people. He is from Isaac, who is from Abraham, who... well, you can go right back to Adam and then to God who breathed the breath of life into him. Jacob is dying in faith.

²⁹ (con't) **bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite,**

For this and the next three verses, Jacob is going to give exceedingly specific detail about the cave where he wishes to be buried. All he really needed to do was to say, "Bury me in the cave with my fathers, Abraham

and Isaac, and the rest of the family who are there." That would have been sufficient, wouldn't it?

But instead, he gives names, places, and specific details. Because he does, it is asking us to evaluate his words in the same detail. The Spirit of prophecy is speaking and He asks us to think. And we will. Before we finish this thought, we will understand why he spoke so exactly.

There are two parts to a man, not three. People speak of the body, soul, and spirit, but man is a soul-body unity. The soul is eternal and the body is temporal. If the soul is reconnected to God before death, then their final destination will be a happy one. If it isn't, then it will be a sad one.

Jacob's soul was to be gathered to his fathers, his body was to be buried with them as well. He has firmly noted a distinction between the two and this distinction is confirmed throughout Scripture. Paul's words to the Corinthians show us this explicitly -

"For we know that if our earthly house, *this* tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ² For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, ³ if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked." 2 Corinthians 5:1-3

Jacob's soul will now be naked, without a body. But his request to his sons demonstrates that he is certain it will not always be this way. He is a man looking forward to the wonderful promise of God which came just moments after the fall of man. He is looking to the promise made to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to him. He is looking forward to the Messiah.

³⁰ in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place.

The record of this purchase is found in Genesis 23 and is recorded at the time of the death of Abraham's beloved wife Sarah. Jacob has already said

the cave is in the field of Ephron the Hittite. And yet, Abraham bought that field when he bought the cave.

He then says that it is in the field of Machpelah, and that it is before Mamre, and in Canaan. The term for "before" is *al pene* or "in the face of." Literally, it is "in the face of Mamre." He then notes that the field was bought from Ephron the Hittite as a possession. The detail is exacting and it shouts out for us to look, research, and determine why.

One commentator said that the particular details were given "because they had been some years absent thence; and to express how much his heart was set upon this matter; and thereby to oblige them to the more careful performance of his command." Poole

Another said all the detail was given because someone may have laid claim to the cave and they would need the details to prove otherwise (Gill), but details don't prove anything without proof. Neither of these explanations are credible. The words are too exact and are intended for us to contemplate in detail.

³¹ There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.

The importance of every word recorded in the Bible can be seen in this verse. The death of Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac are each recorded in varying detail, however, there is no record of the death or burial of Rebekah or Leah until this verse.

This shows us that God selects details for specific reasons. Those things which are unimportant in regards to His plans are simply ignored. People, places, times, and events are only recorded to lead us to understanding the work of Christ. No word is missing and no word which is recorded is superfluous.

³² The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth."

Unexpectedly, Jacob refers to the purchase as being from "the sons of Heth." Ephron *is* a Hittite, or a son of Heth, and so this seems to be unnecessary. But it isn't, just like everything else he has said, it is there for a reason.

To fully understand the detail surrounding Jacob's words, you really need to go back and watch the sermon on Genesis 23, there the same detail that Jacob relays concerning his burial spot is given, along with much more.

The entire chapter pointed to the work of Christ. Abraham at that time pictured Christ who made a purchase on behalf of humanity. Jacob relays enough of the details today for us to be reminded of this. It is the hope that all true believers should have and should carry with them. Here then are the names and their meanings -

Ephron means "of the dust." He is a picture of Adam, who was created from the dust as is recorded right at the beginning, in Chapter 2 of the Bible. Therefore, he represents all of us. He is identified as a Hittite which means "terror" or "fear."

The verb which "Heth" is derived from is usually used to indicate a depletion of strength or to take away an essential support or support structure. Thus Jacob calling him Ephron the Hittite is showing us a picture of Adam who has lost his essential support. In other words, the fall of man which brought us to a state of terror.

From this fallen man, Abraham bought the cave of Machpelah. The meaning of Machpelah is "double." It signifies the double delivery from death which Jesus procured for His people. He didn't come to just purchase the title deed to the world for Jews, but He did it for gentiles as well. His death filled this double role. Ephesians 2 explains this –

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands— ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the

commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father." Ephesians 2:11-18

The next word mentioned is Mamre which means "bitter" or "strong." The idea of bitterness is one of being a strong taste or experience. Mamre represents the bitter, fallen world which Jesus comes to reclaim.

After this, Canaan is named. This comes from the verb *qana* which means "humbled," "subdued," or "lowly." The HAW Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament says, "It denoted bringing a proud and recalcitrant people or spirit into subjection." It therefore pictures those who are humbled.

After this, it again mentioned that the cave was brought from Ephron the Hittite, repeating what had already been said. Then after that, the names of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were all mentioned as being buried there. Each is found to be in this cave, a cave which looks forward to the resurrection.

With the inclusion of Jacob in the tomb, there will be the three great patriarchs and their wives, each of which is an ancestor of Jesus. That is six people, male and female, who then represent all humans, *six* being the biblical number of man.

And then, as a final follow up, he mentions one more time that the field and cave were purchased. They have a new owner. The old owners were "the sons of Heth." This name Heth is where the term Hittite comes from.

It means “terror” and is a picture of all the people of the world who are in Adam and who live in fear of death because they cannot meet God’s standard of the law. When it was given at Mount Sinai, the people trembled in terror and asked not to hear God speak to them directly again.

Since the law was given, men have lived in terror because there is no way we can live up to its standards. Paul explains this in Galatians 3. It condemns all to death. It is from these sons of Heth, or “sons of terror” that the purchase was made. Hebrews 2 explains the terror of death which permeates mankind –

“Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil,¹⁵ and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.” Hebrews 2:14, 15

This cave then is symbolic of the earth, the repository for the dead. This is seen time and time again in the Bible. Jacob knows his body is going to that repository now to be buried with his people. And so he begins by asking to be buried in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite.

Instead of saying the cave bought by Abraham, he first says it this way. It is a picture of the world as it is now. Next, he calls it "the cave that is in the field of Machpelah" which shows that it is a double cave. It contains Jew and Gentile, male and female, all who are redeemed by the Lord.

This cave is before, or literally, "in the face of" Mamre, meaning bitterness. It is the state of the world. There is bitterness in death and there is bitterness on the way there as well. But it is in the land of Canaan. It is in the land of those who are humbled and brought into subjection before the Lord.

Because of this, he again notes that the field was bought by Abraham from Ephron the Hittite, from the man filled with terror, who is from the dust, in the land of the humbled, the cave was bought. There in that cave six were

buried, and there the field and the cave were bought from the sons of Heth - the sons of terror.

So taking all of this terminology and combining it into what I believe Jacob is saying under the influence of the Spirit, this is what we come up with:

"I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of the man of dust, the fallen man who is filled with terror, in the cave that is in the field of double - Jew and Gentile, which is in the face of bitterness in the land of the humbled, which (the) Father of many nations bought with the field of the fallen man of the dust, the one filled with terror, as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of terror." Charlie Garrett's interpretation of Genesis 49:29-32

Everything that has been said here is a recalling of what was given in Genesis 23. It is Jacob's hope in the future while being planted in the ground in the present. Through the Spirit, he tells his sons and thus us that he is a seed waiting to sprout forth from this spot to eternal life someday, all because of the work of Messiah.

This is the hope of the redeemed, that though our body will someday be laid in the dust, we are promised and assured of a new one, an everlasting one that will never perish. This is what Paul speaks of in 2 Corinthians 5.

*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed
We have a building from God, a house not made with hands
This one will last eternally, one forever to be enjoyed
A body which through the endless ages withstands*

*For in this we groan, earnestly desiring
To be clothed with our heavenly habitation
If indeed, for to this we have been aspiring
To be clothed through a glorious transformation
Then we shall not be found naked nor bare
For us glorious garments Christ does now prepare*

III. The Death of Jacob, Who is Israel (verse 33)

³³ And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons,

Again it notes that Jacob had *commanded* his sons. What was spoken was expected to be with all of their participation. He had already secured a guarantee on oath that Joseph would ensure his burial there in Canaan, but now we see that all of the sons are expected to be a part of it.

The meticulous wording concerning his burial is especially important to note because Jacob didn't say all these things when he previously charged Joseph. In chapter 47, when that charge was given, the only words used were these -

"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,³⁰ but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." Genesis 47:29, 30

Instead, he waited until all the covenant sons were present to say what he said. Such seemingly unimportant things are actually of the highest importance as we look into the mind of God as the Spirit has revealed it in His word.

The purchase of the cave and field were in anticipation of the resurrection which would be realized in Messiah. All of the sons of Israel were to participate in ushering Him into the world as the sons of the covenant, as the people of Israel. This is why Jacob waited to speak these words in front of all the sons.

Their hope was to be that great hope which will be seen throughout all of the rest of the prophetic writings, right up until the time that John the Baptist cries out the words, "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" John 1:29

It is Israel who would carry the blessing and also the bear the burden of the law which only He could fulfill. Jacob's words were a command which

looked forward to the wondrous day when the world of terrified, fallen man would be bought back by the Lord whom he had so intimately fellowshiped with.

And now, at the end of a long life filled with blessings and trials, joys and sorrows, he was ready to receive his final reward...

33 (con't) he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last,

Jacob was born in the year 2169AM to Isaac and Rebekah. He was the younger of twins, and his life was used in the most astonishing way to show us pictures of all of redemptive history. The seven dispensations of time were seen in his movements in and out and throughout the land of Canaan.

The two exiles of the people who would come from him were pictured in events from his life. And the majestic work of Jesus Christ was seen again and again in his actions and movements. God directed his each and every step for us to behold the marvelous work of Christ.

Jacob lived 147 full years and finally expired in the year 2316AM. The most recorded and detailed life in the book of Genesis finally came to an end in a most peaceful way. It says that "he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last."

Having blessed his sons from a sitting position, certainly being sustained by the anointing of the Spirit upon him, he now felt content to lie back down and enter into the splendor of eternity.

***33 (fin) and was gathered to his people.**

Just a few short minutes earlier, he knew that his time was ending. Now it is realized. The soul left the body, thus demonstrating once again that man is more than just a physical being. His request to be buried in Canaan implies that the body is separate from the soul and that the souls of his ancestors were in a separate place than where their bodies lay.

For him to be gathered to his people now, and for his body to be buried more than 70 days later, shows two distinct occurrences; one spiritual, and one physical. There is Jacob the man who walked in this fallen world and who was destined to die.

And there is Israel who fellowships with His God and who continues on through his people after him. It is to and through this group of people that the Messiah eventually came. The hope of fallen man was realized in the Person of Jesus Christ, Jacob's greatest descendant.

And that hope still rings true today. If you are found in Adam when you die, you will never receive the glorious promises of heaven and eternal life. But if you are found in Christ, they are yours by a covenant settled in His own blood.

Closing Verse: "Remember these, O Jacob,
And Israel, for you *are* My servant;
I have formed you, you *are* My servant;
O Israel, you will not be forgotten by Me!" Isaiah 44:21

Next Week: Genesis 50:1-14 (The Burial of Jacob) (129th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

The Death of Jacob

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel
And this is what their father to them addressed
And he blessed them as the Bible does tell
Each one according to his own blessing he blessed
Then he charged them and to them said
"I am to be gathered to my people, but it's alright
Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the days ahead
That is in the field of Ephron the Hittite

In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah
Which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan
Which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron
The Hittite for a burial place as a possession
There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife
There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife too
And there I buried Leah when her days were through

The field and the cave that is there
Were purchased from the sons of Heth
As each of you is now aware
And when Jacob had finished, his sons commanding
He drew up into the bed his feet
And breathed his last as his life was ending
And was gathered to his people in sleep so sweet

Jacob's death though sad is not the end of his story
He continues on through those who are his seed
And he will someday be raised to eternal glory
Because of his faith in Christ, his greatest deed
And we like Jacob can take hold of the same promise
Eternal life for us can also be our own guarantee
By simple faith in the work of our Lord Jesus
In that one act we can hold on to such a wondrous surety

Thank You O God, for You have done marvelous things for us
Thank You O God, for our sure hope because of Jesus

Hallelujah and Amen...