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BIBLE ADVENTURES SCRIPT:

A1815 ~ Jacob Foretells Return to Canaan.

Welcome to Bible Adventures. Help for today. Hope for tomorrow. Jesus is Lord of all.

Today's *Bible Adventure* is about the death of Jacob, Joseph's father, at the ripe old age of 147 years, as well as the time just preceding this. Many fear death because they're unsure of what might happen afterwards. The Scriptures are very clear that once a person dies, there'll be a time that they must give an account to God of what they did while living on earth. For those who've not developed a faith in God and His Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ during their life here on earth, there's a good reason to be apprehensive.

But for those who've lived a life of faith in God while alive on earth, they can be comforted by a raft of encouraging pieces written by saints of the past. These include: 'Death is as the foreshadowing of life.' 'We die that we may die no more!' 'Death is the golden key that opens the palace of eternity.'

There are better things ahead than any we leave behind. The Apostle Paul said: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." If you're right in your heart with your Heavenly Father through the redeeming work and power of His Son Jesus Christ, never fear dying, my beloved. Dying is the last but least matter that a Christian has to be anxious about. To a good person in Christ, to die and go to heaven is the greatest gain. The foolish fear of death as the greatest of evils but the wise desire it as the rest after their labours and the end of all ills.

Jacob had been living in Goshen in the Nile Delta in Egypt now for 17 years. His family had expanded greatly during this time, as so did their possessions. Jacob was preparing to die and so he called Joseph to him.

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When Jacob became ill, Joseph knew that his father would soon die. So Joseph took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to see their grandfather and receive a blessing. Jacob reminded Joseph of the promises that God had given him when Jacob himself was fleeing from his twin brother Esau. These promises were only just beginning to be fulfilled. Jacob's descendants had greatly increased in the land of Egypt. But Jacob spoke of God's gift of the land of Canaan being an everlasting possession to his descendants, the Jews.

Many Jews and some Christians today view all the land between Egypt's river and the Euphrates River in present-day Syria and Iraq, to belong to the Jews forever. However, we all need to keep in mind that one day, this earth will be replaced by a new heaven and a new earth. Until then, knowing Christ as our Lord and Saviour is the most important treasure in this present world.

Jacob expressed his intention to adopt Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as his own sons, with any further children born to Joseph to be legally his. Why would Jacob do such a thing? Jacob was in effect giving Joseph the double portion of inheritance to which the eldest son was traditionally entitled. Jacob was deliberately giving Joseph the status of 'firstborn' among the brothers, when he was actually the 11th son born in the family.

Jacob then asked that Manasseh and Ephraim be brought to him so that he could bless them. Since Jacob was almost blind, Joseph positioned his elder son Manasseh closest to Jacob's right hand. But Jacob reached out and crossed his hands so that his right hand was on the head of Ephraim, the younger brother. This displeased Joseph and thinking his blind father was making a mistake, he tried to switch Jacob's hands. But Jacob wouldn't allow this to happen. Guided by God, Jacob had deliberately given Ephraim the status of the 'elder son'.

God established this pattern to demonstrate that His choices are not based on natural descent or in anyone's rights or merit. God sovereignly chooses who He wants to inherit His blessings. Walking with God in faith and obedience is what God expects from each of us through generation after generation.

In Chapter 49 of Genesis, after Jacob gave blessings to his adopted sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, he proceeded to bless each of his own 12 sons. Under the direct inspiration of God, Jacob prophesied what would happen to their descendants after leaving Egypt. Jacob expressed displeasure with his first three sons, but he didn't reject them in the way that Esau had been. Every one of these future tribes would have a part to play in the eventual conquest of the Promised Land in Canaan and the establishment of the nation of Israel.

Following Jacob's predictions to his sons, he again urged them to take his body back to Canaan for burial. He then lay down on his bed and breathed his last. Joseph wept over his father and he kissed his face, before giving orders for the embalming process of his father to begin. It normally took 40 days for embalming. The family mourned for Jacob for 70 days and at the end of that time, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's officials about getting Pharaoh's permission to take his father's body back to Canaan for burial.

A huge group of Egyptian officials, Jacob's descendants and many more on horseback and in chariots, went up to Canaan for the burial of Jacob. Only the families with young children and all the sheep, goats and cattle stayed behind in Goshen. When the procession arrived at the cave where Abraham, Isaac and their wives were buried, the people gathered around and mourned loudly for a long time. Joseph performed mourning ceremonies for 7 days. After Joseph had buried his father, he returned to Egypt with the great crowd of people who had gone with him for the funeral.

The grieving process for Joseph and his brothers and their families must have taken over their lives for a number of months. Grief is an expression of loss for something or someone that you can never replace. This means that if your house was burnt down, there would be a grieving time for the things gone up in flames. An understanding of the grieving process helps the person to understand that their thinking is impaired and that during the period of mourning, it isn't a good time to be making dramatic changes in one's lifestyle. For some people, the worst way to grieve is to retreat into isolation and wait to feel better.

During the grieving process, those who have a close relationship with their Heavenly Father have the added advantage of being able to freely pray to Him and asking for help during the most difficult days. Some find that they can't pray, so ask someone else to pray for them. In time, grief must be resolved by establishing a changed bond with the dead person. Life must go on and the past must be left behind. This isn't being disloyal to a dead loved one but the deep season of grief must come to an end at some point, for good health's sake, if nothing else.

This journey of grief recovery might take a few years and new skills will need to be learnt on the way. It seems nearly disrespectful to say but after a while, those grieving need to learn to smile and laugh again. Laughter brings a sense of healing and wellbeing with it. Like many other experiences of life, grief helps us to grow closer to our loving Lord and find sanctuary in His arms, even though we miss those who've passed on.

Joseph's brothers were afraid that after Jacob's funeral, Joseph might still punish them for their evil deed of selling him into slavery. They'd thought Joseph wouldn't do anything while their father was alive but now Jacob was no longer their protector, they thought up a plan. They sent a message to Joseph, saying that their father had instructed Joseph to forgive them of their crime against him. The brothers may have made this up but Joseph was grieved that they still distrusted him and that he had failed to persuade them of his forgiveness.

The brothers came before Joseph and they bowed before him, once again fulfilling his boyhood dreams of his brothers bowing in front of him. Joseph told them not to be afraid, as he wouldn't put himself in the place of God. We humans are often tempted to take to ourselves worship and honour that should only be for God. Joseph reassured his brothers of his forgiveness and spoke kindly to them.

Joseph lived in Egypt until he was 110 years old. He told his brothers that he was about to die but one day, God would bring them out of Egypt into the land God had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Joseph asked his people to give him a solemn promise that when God led them to that land, they would take his bones back with them. When Joseph died, they embalmed his body and they put it in a coffin.

This story finishes the first book of Genesis in the Old Testament of the Bible. Over the past weeks, we've traced the godly line God established from Noah to the patriarchs of the tribes of the future nation of Israel. We all need to remember that the value of life doesn't come from how long we live for, but how we used our time on earth in service and dedication to our Lord.

The drama is from The Bible In Living Sound.

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