

# BOB HALLMAN - THE EPIC LIFE

## “Passing The Torch”

Genesis 48:1-22

2003

### Introduction

Recently, I've been reading about the remarkable life of Henry Opukaha'ia.

- Born on the Big Island in 1792.
- As a teen his family and village was slaughtered by warring tribes.
- Adopted by the man who killed his parents
- Groomed to be a pagan Hawaiian high priest.
- Fled on a whaling ship from Kealakekua Bay – where Captain Cook died.
- Came to New England where he heard and received the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- He desired to bring the Good News of Jesus Christ to the people of Hawaii.
- But died of Typhoid fever in 1918 at the age of 26. On his death bed he wept for the Hawaiian people and asked God to send someone to preach to them.
- A book entitled, *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah*, quickly became a best seller.
- Henry's torch may not have burned long, but it burned bright and people were drawn to its light. The church was stirred to action.
- In 1920, Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston came to the Sandwich Islands on the Brig Thaddeus. In the next few years 75 men and over 100 women came to Hawaii because of the vision of one man who held the torch of faith.

Dwight, E. *Memoirs of Henry Obookiah*. Hilo: Women's Board of Missions for the Pacific Islands [republished]. 2012.

These men and women preceded us by 180 years. But they were newcomers on the world scene compared to Jacob who, almost 4,000 years earlier, had carried the torch of God's covenant for 147 years and, like Henry, was about to die. But before he did he determined to pass the torch on to those who would follow.

### I Jacob Reviewed God's Blessing

A. Jacob was **ill** [Verse 1a]

The death of which he had so frequently spoken of, and even longed for at times, was knocking on his door.

B. Jacob was visited by Joseph and his sons: [Verse 1b-2]

1. **Manasseh** = “To forget”

Gen 41:51 “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh and said, "It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father's household."

2. **Ephraim** = “To be fruitful”

Gen 41:52 “The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.”

Manasseh and Ephraim were born during the seven years of abundance, before the first year of the famine (41:50). Jacob went down to Egypt somewhere around the end of the second year of the famine (45:6) and lived 17 years after he arrived (47:28). Since Jacob was near death, the sons of Joseph must have been about 20 years old.

C. Jacob recounted his **relationship** with God [Verse 3-4]

1. God appeared to him at Luz and blessed him  
*Luz* = “Bethel,” where Jacob first met God.

- a. It was where Jacob dreamed of the stairway to heaven before he left from Canaan to find a wife in Haran - *Gen. 28:10-22*
- b. It was where Jacob built an altar to the Lord after he returned to Canaan from living with Laban - *Gen 35:6-7*

In both encounters ...

2. God promised to make him **fruitful**  
Jacob is recalling God’s covenant promises:

- a. I will increase your numbers
- b. I will make you’re a community of peoples  
*Gen 28:14-15* “Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.”

3. God promised him the land of Canaan
  - a. As an everlasting possession to Jacob’s descendents  
*Gen 28:13* “I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying.”

## II Jacob Adopted Joseph’s Sons

A. He **reckoned** Joseph’s sons as his own [Verse 5]

1. Even as Reuben and Simeon were his own  
Normally, the birthright would have been given to the firstborn son. But, Reuben and Simeon had disqualified themselves from positions of status and leadership in Israel’s family because of their sin.
  - a. Reuben due to his sin of laying with Bilhah, Jacob’s concubine (*Gen 35:22; 49:4; 1 Chron 5:1-2*).
  - b. Simeon due to his violent murder of the men of Shechem (*Gen 34:25ff*)  
In essence, Jacob adopted Ephraim and Manasseh in place of Reuben and

Simeon as far as the birthright was concerned.

- B. He acknowledged that future sons of Joseph's: [Verse 6]
1. Would be his own
  2. Would inherit the territory of their brothers
- C. He **grieved** the loss of his wife, Rachel [Verse 7]
1. She died and was buried in Canaan near Ephrath - Gen 35:16-20 (Bethlehem)  
Had she not died at such a young age, she would have undoubtedly given Jacob additional children. So the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh, in a sense, make up for Rachel's "lost children."

### III Jacob Passed The Torch

- A. He questioned the **identity** of his guests [Verse 8a]  
We are told the reason for this in verse 10 – Jacob's eyes were failing and he could hardly see (Gen 27:1).
- B. He desired to **bless** Joseph's sons [Verse 8-12]

**Illustration:** Jesus blessing the children

Mark 10:16 "And he took the children in his arms, put his hands on them and blessed them."

**Application:** The importance of a father's blessing!

Many children never hear an encouraging word from their father. Instead ...  
They are reminded of their weaknesses and failings.  
They are crippled by words of criticism and rejection.

a. Encouraging words

Eph 4:29 "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."

b. Spiritual words

Acts 14:21-22 "... they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith."

**Strengthening** = Episterizo = "To confirm or increase power"

**Encouraging** = Parakaleo = "To comfort, encourage or draw near"

c. "Torch-passing" words

1. Identify and share the gifts of God you see in your children.
2. Give them a vision of what God can do through them.
3. Lay your hands on their head and bless them in the Lord's name.  
2 Tim 1:6 "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, *which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*"

C. He intentionally **reversed** the blessing [Verse 13-14]

We aren't told whether Jacob had seen something in the personalities of the boys that led him to give Ephraim this favored position or whether it was the result of God's divine guidance.

1. He put his right hand on Ephraim who was younger
2. He put his left hand on Manasseh who was the first-born

D. He blessed Joseph:

The blessing on Joseph's two sons by Jacob was primarily a blessing on Joseph.

1. By reviewing God's **identity** [Verse 15-16a]

a. He was the God of Abraham and Isaac

They were men who had walked with God:

**Application:** Two things are necessary to walk with God

1. They went in God's **direction** - Amos 3:3
2. They kept in **step** with God - Gal 5:25

b. He had been Jacob's life-long **Shepherd**

**Shepherd** = Ra` ah = Literally "The God who has shepherded me."

This is the first mention in the Bible of God as a shepherd to His people.

**Application:** The Bible frequently refers to the Lord as our Shepherd

"The Lord is my shepherd ..." (Ps 23)

"I am the Good Shepherd ..." (Jn 10:11)

c. He sent his Angel to deliver Jacob from all harm

**Angel** = Mal'ak = "A messenger or ambassador"

The Angel of the Lord appears frequently in the OT:

1. He appeared to Hagar when she fled from Sarai (Gen 16:7-13)
2. He wrestled with Jacob (Gen 33:22-32; Hosea 12:4)
3. He appeared to Moses in the burning bush (Ex 3:2)

Most scholars believe this Angel, who had delivered Jacob from all harm, to be a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ.

**Deliver** = Ga'al = "To redeem (as in kinsman redeemer)"

This is the first use of Ga'al (redeemer) in the Bible and it is significant that it occurs in conjunction with the work of the Angel of the Lord, giving further evidence that this is none other than Jesus Christ Himself.

**Application:** God never promised us a problem-free life ...

Ps 34:7 “The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them.”

2. By **blessing** Joseph’s sons [Verse 16b]
  - a. They would be called by the name of their ancestors
    1. Jacob, Isaac and Abraham

**Application:** We are adopted as sons and daughters of God and are called by His name.

Eph 1:5 “In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ ...

John 1:12 “... gave the right to become children of God.”

- b. They would **increase** greatly on the earth

**Application:** God’s unchanging plan – to fill His kingdom with offspring.

1. In the Garden of Eden, the first thing God commanded man to do was to be fruitful and multiply.
 

Gen 1:28 “God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.”
2. In the Upper Room Discourse in John 15, just hours before his crucifixion, Jesus told the 12 disciples, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit -- fruit that will last.”
3. Than after His resurrection, Jesus commanded the disciples to “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:18-20).

- E. He was interrupted by Joseph [Verse 17-20]

1. Jacob’s “**mistake**” displeased Joseph
 

When Joseph saw his father crossing his hands and giving the birthright to Ephraim, he assumed it was a mistake and attempted to correct his father.
2. Jacob acknowledged Joseph’s concern
 

But insisted on giving preeminence to Ephraim who was Joseph’s 2<sup>nd</sup>-born. After our study of Genesis we shouldn’t be surprised by this reversal:

  - a. Isaac over Ishmael
  - b. Jacob over Esau - Romans 9:10-12
  - c. And now, Ephraim over Manasseh.

Why does God seem to repeatedly choose the younger over the older?

1. To highlight the election of God
 

Rom 9:11-12 “Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad-in order that God's purpose in election might stand: not by works but by him who calls ...”
2. The highlight the mercy of God

Rom 9:15-16 "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

3. To highlight the glory of God

1 Cor 1:27-29 "God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

3. Jacob affirmed the blessing of Manasseh

- a. He would become a **people**
- b. He would become great

This is virtually the same thing that God said about Abraham's firstborn son, Ishmael.

Gen 17:20 "And as for Ishmael, I have heard you: I will surely bless him; I will make him fruitful and will greatly increase his numbers. He will be the father of twelve rulers, and I will make him into a great nation."

4. Jacob affirmed the blessing of Ephraim

- a. He would be **greater** than Manasseh
- b. His descendents would become a group of **nations**

This was fulfilled in Israel's history. Both tribes were blessed, but the tribe of Ephraim was greater (Isaiah 7:8, 17; 11:13).

5. Jacob finished blessing Joseph's sons

- a. By their names Israel would pronounce blessing  
"May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."

#### IV Jacob Acted In Faith

A. He informed Joseph of his impending death [Verse 21a]

Jacob would not personally see the fulfillment of God's covenant promises. But he passed on the torch of faith to his son Joseph.

B. He assured Joseph of God's **presence** [Verse 21b]

For Jacob, this wasn't just religious jargon – it was his personal testimony!

**Application:** God's presence is promised to those who are on God's mission!

Matt 28:19-20 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

C. He assured Joseph of God's **promise** [Verse 21c]

- 1. God would take him back to the land of Canaan

**Application:** Paul's testimony

2 Tim 4:18 "The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom."

D. He appointed Joseph over his brothers [Verse 22a]

**Application:** God always manages to find a man to carry on His work.

Charles Spurgeon:

"If Abraham dies, there is Isaac; and if Isaac dies, there is Jacob; and if Jacob dies, there is Joseph; and if Joseph dies, Ephraim and Manasseh survive. The Lord shall never lack a champion to bear his standard high among the sons of men ..."

E. He gave Joseph the area of Shechem [Verse 22b]

1. Land that Jacob took from the Amorites

Apparently, while still in Canaan, Jacob battled for control of a portion of land from the Amorites, and he deeded the land to Joseph and his descendants, to be appropriated some 400 years later!

Joseph's bones were brought from Egypt and buried at Shechem (Josh 24:32)

**Conclusion:**

1. If you have never been adopted into God's family and received the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ:

a. Repent of your sin

**Repent** = Metaneo = "To think differently and to change course."

Acts 3:19 "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord ..."

b. Reconcile with God

**Reconcile** = Apokatalasso = "To put right a broken relationship"

1 Peter 3:18 "For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

c. Realign your heart to God (your loyalties and allegiance)

2 Cor 5:15 "And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again."

**Prayer of Commitment:**

Dear God, I invite you to come into my life and be my Savior and Lord.

1. Acknowledge and repent of sin
2. Believe in Jesus Christ as Savior
3. Confess Him as Lord
4. Thank Him for adopting you into His family, giving you eternal life.

2. Pass on the blessing
  - a. To your spouse
  - b. To your children
  - c. To those God has put in your life
  
3. Pass on the torch
  - a. Through your example
    - 1 Tim 4:12 "... set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity."
  
  - b. Through disciple making
    - 2 Tim 2:1-2 "You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others."

Throughout the ages the saints of God have faithfully carried the torch of the gospel of Jesus Christ:

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob --- Peter, James, John --- Paul, Barnabas, Timothy.  
Henry Opuka'iah, Hiram Bingham and Asa Thurston.

Now, more than ever before, He is looking for men and women who are willing to burn brightly for Him and to pass the torch on to others who in turn will fill His kingdom with worshippers.

Heb 12:1-3 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. 2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

And may those who come behind us find us faithful!