

# ***Truth for Today***

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## **Double Calls - God called twice: Jacob, Jacob!**

In Genesis 46:2 we have God calling to Jacob in an unusual way, "Jacob, Jacob!" Jacob is one of seven people in the Bible who are spoken to in this manner. He had reached a very critical stage in his life - he was about to leave the land which God had promised to his grandfather, father and also himself.

We often reach decision points in our lives, some are rather simple to deal with, others require careful consideration. It is at times like this that we need a friend to turn to, for consultation and for guidance. In a marriage situation, many issues would normally be discussed between husband and wife. In a Christian situation God should always be included.

In many countries, and particularly the more developed nations, the demand for counsellors and counselling has reached almost epidemic proportions, and covers just about every aspect of life and social function, even to the extreme of having counsellors for pets! It would seem that as nations develop, the people of those nations appear to become more reluctant to take responsibility for or keep to their commitments! There appears to be this deep need for someone else to make the decision. People need to turn to God for help rather than fellow human beings. Jacob was a man who needed a counsellor, although for the majority of his life he did things his own way. However, when the greatest test to his faith came, the greatest Counsellor of all came to his assistance.

Jacob's natural character was evident right at his birth when he took hold of the heel of his twin brother, Esau (Genesis 25). As a result, he received the name Jacob, meaning 'supplanter'. As Jacob's personality developed, he became a person who was self sufficient, aggressive in achieving his aims, with personal survival high in his nature. So the life of Jacob was marked, not by being dependent upon God but by trying to be self reliant. He set out to achieve things by his own schemes. In Genesis 27, Jacob deceives his father. Jacob even made bargains with God. In Genesis 28, we read of Jacob saying "If God will be with me". It took him a long time to learn to obey, to wait and to depend upon God.

Jacob had been in deep distress over the loss of Joseph, the son whom he dearly loved and in whom he had centred all his hopes. But Jacob has now learned that his long lost son is alive, well and, as governor over all the land of Egypt, was able to provide for him during the time of famine. Jacob had seen all the transport which Joseph had sent to make his journey down to Egypt a comfortable one. Now Jacob understood the lesson which God was teaching him. God was saying, "Depend on Me".

Jacob begins his long journey to Egypt by going first to Beersheba. This was the place where, many years ago, he had first left home. He had been sent away by his parents to find a wife amongst his mother's family. Beersheba is the place where God had made promises - the name means "well of the oath". I believe that, at long last, Jacob had come to realise the value of seeking God's mind before embarking upon any activity, whether great or small. It is interesting to recall that, during the Second World War when for some considerable time the UK stood alone against the aggressor, the people of this country were encouraged to pray! The encouragement came from the Sovereign and the Government. Perhaps we need once again rulers who understand the value of prayer! So Jacob comes to Beersheba to worship and to offer sacrifices.

Life in Egypt would be very different from being a stranger and a pilgrim in the land of promise. Having come and offered his sacrifices of worship, Jacob can now, with some confidence, lie down to sleep. It is then that God speaks to him in a night vision (Genesis 46). God calls to Jacob in this touching way: "Jacob, Jacob". Jacob responds by simply saying, "Here I am". The only previous person to be addressed in this way was Abraham in Genesis 22. Then it was an urgent call. God wanted quickly to stop Abraham sacrificing Isaac. Here with Jacob the feeling in God's voice would be so different. The impression of the God of all comfort, the God who cares, would be felt and heard in the way God said, "Jacob, Jacob". We can sense the patience of God also coming through to this aged patriarch and saying, perhaps, "Don't you know Me by now. I'm the God who is with you and will take care of you all through your life".

In the early verses of Genesis 46, God unfolds four very interesting things: a statement of assurance and three promises which would surely bring both comfort and encouragement to Jacob.

1. Do not fear, verse 3.
2. I will make of you a great nation there (in Egypt), verse 3.
3. I will go down with you to Egypt, verse 4.
4. I will also surely bring you up again, verse 4.

When Jacob left home many years previously, he had bargained with God. How different he is here! Jacob says nothing. God does all the talking and Jacob listens. Sometimes we need to be like Jacob. When God finishes talking, Jacob gets up and now, with confidence, continues his journey down to Egypt.

Is there any instruction for us now? I believe so. Let's look at the four things that God brings before Jacob and see if we can find similar encouragement for ourselves today.

### **Do Not Fear**

Three little words and yet they contain a wealth of help to every believer in God. Christians go through a wide range of difficulties in their lives. Head line news of horrific persecution, death, torture, physical abuse in every continent of this world are the more serious and dramatic issues, through to the other extreme where some have no job, are taken advantage of, or simply excluded, because they are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. The "Do not fear" has real and practical comfort in any situation. I have already mentioned that we do have a God who cares. 2 Corinthians 1 states, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble". There are two things to note here: first, that we have a God who cares in all situations; secondly, those who experience the comfort of God are in a position to care for others going through similar difficulties.

In the Gospel of Mark, at the end of chapter 4, the disciples in deep distress because of the storm cry out to the Lord Jesus, "Do You not care that we are perishing?" The Lord by a simple word commands the elements of nature to be calm. We may not experience great or dramatic events in our lives, but it is still a great encouragement to know we have a God who can meet every situation with the assurance of "Do not fear".

### **A Great Nation**

Changing circumstances in no way nullify God's promises. The promise that God had made to Abraham that he would become a great nation is found in Genesis 15. God had said to Abraham, "Count the stars if you are able to number them. So shall your descendants be." Although the family had grown considerably in the time from Abraham to Jacob, it could not be said that it was a nation. However, during the four hundred years Jacob's large family would be in Egypt, it would grow into a nation probably numbering a few million people in total.

Today every believer in the Lord Jesus Christ belongs to a family far greater than the nation of Israel. The family of God is not limited to a particular nationality. The members of God's family come from every nation of the world. The Christian family is a company of people beyond counting.

In the world today, God is still calling out for Himself a people - those who have come to God in repentance and in faith, having believed in Jesus and His finished work of salvation. That salvation was accomplished by our Lord Jesus Christ in His death on the cross. In this world of opposition, God is forming a people who are sanctified, that is, set apart for God in this world, and also fit for heaven. We should note that God's earthly people lived separately in the land of Goshen in the midst of Egypt. We don't have a land of Goshen like Israel, but we are expected to live lives which are separated unto God. We should be so different that non-Christians will be able to notice, just as the Egyptians knew that the Israelites were different.

Egypt is often presented as a picture of the world seeking to have total dominance of its people. In Genesis 47, eventually all the people, land and livestock of Egypt were owned by Pharaoh. After four hundred years, the Israelites also had become slaves to Pharaoh and needed deliverance. Let us make sure that our lives are not in bondage to the things of this world but let us live as a people who belong to a great God.

### **I Will Go Down With You**

God had promised Jacob that in Egypt he would become a great nation. In this third statement, God promises not to leave Jacob to work things out by himself. God would not leave him alone. Our God does not leave us alone. In John 14:16-18, Jesus promises us, "I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you

forever, even the Spirit of truth ... for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans". In this way, Jesus promises that we will not be left without anyone to care for us in a fatherly way.

We have the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Sometimes we may forget that this holy, heavenly Person resides within each believer. This One is greater than anyone and anything of this world. The Spirit of God did not dwell in the Old Testament saints, but He resides in each Christian today from the moment Christ is accepted as Lord and Saviour. As such, we have a resource available to us to live effectively for God. In the things we say and do, the Spirit of God looks for Christ-like features to be shown in our lives, not the dead features of our unconverted days.

Many of us have known this help and guidance of God in our lives - the right move to make in our careers, or the right decision to make in family matters, whatever it might be. Through the Scriptures and dependence in prayer we have come to appreciate the help of a caring God. In Romans 15 we are reminded of the "comfort of the Scriptures", that which gives guidance for all spheres of life. Also in 2 Corinthians 1, "helping together in prayer", reminds us of the positive value of prayer in testing situations. We are not left alone without help or resource, for God is sufficient for all our needs. We should certainly be more willing to stand still and see just how God can come in with His daily help. It does mean that we should always be in communication with Him. This requires a constant attitude of prayer making day to day requests for direction and studying His word to find answers for our daily lives.

### **I Will Surely Bring You Up Again**

Finally, God promised to bring Jacob out of Egypt. This was fulfilled both for Jacob himself when he died, and for the people more than 400 years later when led out by Moses. As for ourselves, we look for the Saviour to come for us so that we might be with Him forever. In John 14, the Lord Jesus stated clearly that He was going away but also left the promise, "I will come again". In 1 Thessalonians 4 we are told, "The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord".

The nation of Israel has not been forgotten by God. Those remaining promises concerning the Messiah - the Lord Jesus Christ coming back to reign and establish a world kingdom of righteousness, are still to be fulfilled. The Lord will stand again on the Mount of Olives, only the next time that mountain will split in two, see Zechariah 14. The prophecy of Zechariah 9 which was partly fulfilled almost two thousand years ago when Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, goes on in verse 10 to speak of world peace and having dominion from sea to sea. These things are yet to be fulfilled. The God of promises, whom Jacob met up with in Beersheba, has brought, and will yet bring, everything to pass for Jacob and Israel.

Our God will bring all His promises to pass for us in His own good time. Let us live with expectation, being ready to go to heaven and having this prayer from Revelation 22 on our lips, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus". This is the real hope of Christians today. Once we go to be with the Saviour, then God will move quickly to bring many more of His promises to fulfilment.

### **A Great Counsellor**

Let me draw this talk on Jacob to a close by returning to my opening remarks about the demand in many parts of the world for a counsellor and counselling. In Isaiah 9:6-7 we read, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, to order it and establish it with judgement and justice from that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." We see these verses as speaking prophetically of our Lord Jesus Christ. He is a Counsellor of unprecedented ability. Was Jacob giving up all that he had striven for, those promises that God had made to him, by his life changing move to Egypt? The Counsellor came to him in his time of need with those words, "Jacob, Jacob" and "Do not fear".

Are we ready and willing to listen to the Lord in the big and little times of crisis that arise in our lives? There is a God who has the answers to everyone's concerns and, as the Counsellor, He is the one who can advise, give wise and considered direction and guidance on which we can totally rely.

The following verses of a hymn, the author unknown, could be equally true of Jacob of old as of us today:

*Though faint yet pursuing we go on our way;  
The Lord is our leader, our stronghold and stay;  
Though suffering and sorrow and trial we bear,  
The Lord is our refuge, and whom shall we fear?*

*He raiseth the fallen, He cheereth the faint;  
If the weak are oppressed, He hears their complaint;  
The way may be dreary, and thorny the road,  
But why should we falter? Our help is in God.*

*Though clouds may surround us, our God is our light;  
Though storms rage around us, our God is our might;  
So faint yet pursuing, still onward we move,  
The Lord is our leader; our home is above.*

Let us pray. Our God and Father let me have the confidence to be able to turn to Yourself when in need of advice and guidance. Give me the faith to accept Your word and, like Jacob, not to be afraid but to be ready to go and serve as You direct. Amen.

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