Eyes on the Unseen

How Deathbed Blessings Shaped the Destiny of Israel

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> **— Hebrews 11:1, 20–21 (KJV)**

CHAPTER ONE

The Power of Final Words

Imagine standing at the very edge of your earthly life. Picture yourself lying in bed, completely blind with age, weak in body, and living as a stranger in a foreign land far away from home. Every single detail of your physical surroundings tells you that your strength is gone and that you have nothing left in your hands to give the people you love. You hold no crown, command no army, and possess no deed to a grand estate.

Yet inside your mind, you see something nobody else in the room can see. You are looking at a vibrant, detailed map of the future—a spiritual reality far more solid, real, and permanent than the bedframe resting beneath your frail body. As you draw your final breaths, you speak words over your children and grandchildren that are not mere wishes or sentimental

goodbyes, but bold prophetic declarations that will govern the fate of entire nations for thousands of years.

This remarkable picture is not a piece of ancient fiction. It is the exact way the Bible describes the final days of Israel's grand patriarchs, Isaac and Jacob. When the writer of the New Testament book of Hebrews compiled the famous 'Hall of Faith' in chapter eleven, he looked back across centuries of Hebrew history. He could have chosen dozens of dramatic moments from the lives of Isaac and Jacob—wells dug in the desert, treaties signed with kings, angels wrestled at midnight, or stone altars built across Canaan. Instead, the Holy Spirit singled out what these two men did on their deathbeds.

> *"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come. By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."*
> **— Hebrews 11:20–21 (KJV)**

Why Deathbed Blessings Mattered in the Ancient World

To appreciate why Hebrews highlights these final moments, we have to understand what a deathbed blessing meant in the world of Genesis. Today, people often say 'God bless you' casually, or they write a legal will to divide up bank accounts, houses, and family heirlooms after they pass away. In the days of the patriarchs, a father's deathbed blessing was infinitely weightier than a modern legal will.

A patriarchal blessing was a solemn, irreversible transfer of spiritual authority, family leadership, and divine covenant promises. Once spoken by the head of the household, those words could never be taken back, edited, or canceled. They carried the full weight of prophecy because the patriarch spoke as God's appointed representative to the next generation.

More importantly, Isaac and Jacob were passing down a very specific inheritance that God had originally promised to Abraham. Generations earlier, God had called Abraham out of his homeland and made an astonishing pledge to him:

> *"Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee: And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."*
> **— Genesis 12:1–3 (KJV)**

God later confirmed this covenant directly to Isaac when famine struck the land, reminding him that the land and the promised seed belonged to his line:

> *"Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I sware unto Abraham thy father; And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."*
> **— Genesis 26:3–4 (KJV)**

Here is the extraordinary tension at the heart of the story: when Abraham died, and later when Isaac and Jacob lay dying, none of them actually owned the land of Canaan. They lived in tents as wandering strangers. As Stephen later reminded the council in the book of Acts, God 'gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child' (Acts 7:5, KJV).

Think about how strange that looked to outsiders. These dying old men were dividing up real estate they did not own and assigning leadership over massive nations that did not yet exist. By every earthly measurement, they were empty-handed. Yet they spoke with absolute certainty because they anchored their words in the unchanging character of God.

> *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."*
> **— Hebrews 11:13 (KJV)**

What made these two deathbed scenes so legendary that Scripture holds them up as supreme examples of faith? To truly understand, we must travel back to the ancient, dramatic, and deeply human accounts in the book of Genesis where these promises were tested and fulfilled.

CHAPTER TWO

Isaac's Trembling Submission

Hebrews 11:20 tells us that 'by faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.' Yet when we turn to Genesis chapter 27 to read the backstory, we do not find a serene, peaceful family ceremony. Instead, we step right into the middle of a household divided by parental favoritism, secrecy, and elaborate deception. Beneath the surface of human scheming, however, an unstoppable divine plan was moving forward.

A Prophecy Before Birth

The conflict between Jacob and Esau began long before either boy ever took a breath. Isaac's wife, Rebekah, had been barren for twenty years. When Isaac prayed earnestly to the Lord for his wife, God answered by giving her twin boys. During her pregnancy, however, the twins struggled violently inside her womb, causing Rebekah deep distress. When she went to inquire of the Lord about why this was happening, God gave her a direct, unmistakable prophecy:

> *"And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger."*
> — Genesis 25:23 (KJV)

Those final five words—'the elder shall serve the younger'—turned ancient tradition completely upside down. In that culture, the firstborn son automatically received the birthright, a double portion of the family wealth, and the primary spiritual leadership of the clan. Everything belonged to the eldest by default. Yet before the twins were even born, God declared that He was reversing the natural order. Even though Esau came out of the womb first, the younger twin, Jacob, was chosen by God to carry the covenant line.

Favoritism and the Plan to Bypass God's Word

As the boys grew up, their personalities could not have been more different, and their parents quickly picked favorites. Scripture records the sad division inside the home:

> *"And the boys grew: and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field; and Jacob was a plain man, dwelling in tents. And Isaac loved Esau, because he did*

> *eat of his venison: but Rebekah loved Jacob."*
> **— Genesis 25:27–28 (KJV)**

Esau was outdoorsy, rugged, and bold—the kind of son a father like Isaac naturally admired. Furthermore, Esau kept Isaac supplied with fresh wild game. Even though Esau had already shown contempt for his spiritual heritage by selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of red stew (Genesis 25:29–34), and even though Esau grieved his parents deeply by marrying Hittite women (Genesis 26:34–35), Isaac still clung to his personal preference.

Years later, when Isaac grew old and his eyesight failed him completely, he decided it was time to pass on the great family blessing. Quietly, without telling Rebekah or Jacob, Isaac summoned Esau into his tent:

> *"And it came to pass, that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see, he called Esau his eldest son, and said unto him, My son: and he said unto him, Behold, here am I. And he said, Behold now, I am old, I know not the day of my death: Now therefore take, I pray thee, thy weapons, thy quiver and thy bow, and go out to the field, and take me some venison; And make me savoury meat, such as I love, and bring it to me, that I may eat; that my soul may bless thee before I die."*
> **— Genesis 27:1–4 (KJV)**

Notice the secrecy and the personal appetite driving Isaac's decision. Isaac knew what God had said to Rebekah before the boys were born. He knew the covenant promise belonged to the younger son. Yet, letting his human favoritism cloud his judgment, Isaac attempted to ignore God's plan and slip the primary blessing to his rugged oldest son Esau behind closed doors.

The Disguise and the Stolen Blessing

Rebekah overheard Isaac's conversation with Esau and sprang into action. Determined that Jacob would receive the blessing God had promised him, she devised a daring, deceitful plot. While Esau was out hunting in the fields, Rebekah prepared two young goats to taste just like the savory venison Isaac loved. She dressed Jacob in Esau's best garments, which smelled like the outdoors, and covered Jacob's smooth hands and neck with the hairy skins of the young goats so he would feel like his rugged brother.

Jacob walked into his blind father's tent pretending to be Esau. Isaac was suspicious at first because the voice sounded like Jacob, and the meal had been prepared remarkably fast. He asked Jacob to come close so he could feel him:

> *"And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am."*
> **— Genesis 27:22–24 (KJV)**

Convinced by the touch of the fake animal fur and the earthy smell of Esau's clothes, Isaac ate the meal, kissed his son, and spoke the monumental covenant blessing over Jacob—believing all the while that he was blessing Esau:

> *"Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee."*
> **— Genesis 27:28–29 (KJV)**

The Moment of Truth: Exceeding Trembling

Jacob had barely left his father's presence when Esau returned from the hunt with his freshly cooked venison. Esau walked into the tent expecting his father's blessing, only to trigger one of the most dramatic realizations in all of Scripture:

> *"And Isaac his father said unto him, Who art thou? And he said, I am thy son, thy firstborn Esau. And Isaac trembled very exceedingly, and said, Who? where is he that hath taken venison, and brought it me, and I have eaten of all before thou camest, and have blessed him? yea, and he shall be blessed."*
> **— Genesis 27:32–33 (KJV)**

Pause and look closely at Isaac's reaction in verse 33. The Bible says that Isaac 'trembled very exceedingly.' Why did this elderly man shake violently from head to toe? Did he fly into a blind rage and try to cancel the blessing? No. If Isaac had simply been furious at being tricked, he would have declared the blessing null and void on the spot. In human courts, an agreement obtained under false pretenses is immediately thrown out.

Isaac trembled because he suddenly realized he had been fighting against Almighty God—and God had overruled his human favoritism. In that flash of spiritual clarity, the truth struck him like thunder: God had ensured that the prophecy spoken before the twins' birth ('the elder shall serve the younger') came to pass.

Even when Esau cried out with 'a great and exceeding bitter cry' and pleaded with his father to undo the blessing or find another primary blessing for him, Isaac stood firm:

> *"And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, Behold, I have made him thy lord, and all his brethren have I given to him for servants; and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my son?"*
> **— Genesis 27:36–37 (KJV)**

In that moment of trembling, Isaac chose faith over his own desires. He bowed his will to God's sovereignty and declared with absolute certainty, 'yea, and he shall be blessed.' He trusted that God's sovereign word concerning things to come was unshakeable.

Later, when Jacob was preparing to leave home for Padan-aram, Isaac called him back—this time with full knowledge of who he was—and freely, willingly confirmed the full blessing of Abraham upon him:

> *"And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."*
> **— Genesis 28:3–4 (KJV)**

Isaac also spoke a secondary prophetic word over Esau (Genesis 27:39–40), foretelling that Esau's descendants would live by the sword and eventually break free from Jacob's yoke. Thus, Hebrews 11:20 rightly commends Isaac: by faith—surrendered, humble faith—he blessed both Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

CHAPTER THREE

Jacob's Crossed Hands and Prophetic Sight

Generations later, Jacob found himself in a remarkably similar position. The younger twin who had once stood beside his blind father's bed was now an old, blind man himself. Moreover, Jacob was dying in Egypt, hundreds of miles away from the Promised Land of Canaan.

A severe famine had driven Jacob and his entire family out of Canaan and down into Egypt, where God had miraculously elevated Jacob's son Joseph to become the second-most powerful ruler in the empire, answering only to Pharaoh. For seventeen years, Jacob lived safely in the Egyptian district of Goshen under Joseph's care. Finally, at the age of one hundred and forty-seven, Jacob's physical strength gave out, and he knew the time had come to pass on the covenant blessing.

Adopting Two Egyptian-Born Grandsons

When word reached Joseph that his father was gravely ill, Joseph immediately took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, and traveled to Jacob's bedside (Genesis 48:1). Consider the background of these two boys: they were born in Egypt to an Egyptian mother, Asenath, the daughter of an Egyptian priest (Genesis 41:45). Raised in the luxury and prestige of Pharaoh's royal court, Manasseh and Ephraim could easily have assimilated into Egyptian nobility and forgotten their Hebrew heritage forever.

When Jacob heard that Joseph had arrived, the dying patriarch gathered all his remaining physical strength and sat upright on the edge of his bed (Genesis 48:2). Before pronouncing a blessing over the boys, Jacob took a decisive legal step: he adopted Manasseh and Ephraim as his own full sons, elevating them to the exact same tribal rank as his eldest sons, Reuben and Simeon:

> *"And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine."*
> **— Genesis 48:5 (KJV)**

By adopting Joseph's two sons, Jacob effectively gave Joseph the double portion of the firstborn—two full tribal inheritances in the future land of Israel instead of one. He pulled

these two young men out of the wealth and status of Egypt and permanently anchored their identity in the covenant people of God.

The Shocking Crossing of Hands

Next, Jacob asked Joseph to bring the boys close so he could bless them. Because Jacob's eyes were 'dim for age, so that he could not see' (Genesis 48:10), Joseph carefully positioned his sons by strict birth order. He placed Manasseh, the older boy, on his own left so that Manasseh stood directly in front of Jacob's right hand—the hand of primary honor, authority, and preeminence. He placed Ephraim, the younger boy, on his own right so that Ephraim stood in front of Jacob's left hand.

Joseph thought he had lined everything up cleanly so his blind father would not make a mistake. Then Jacob did something shocking:

> *"And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn."*
> **— Genesis 48:13–14 (KJV)**

Look at that unforgettable phrase in the King James Version: 'guiding his hands wittingly.' Jacob deliberately crossed his arms, placing his primary right-hand blessing on the younger boy, Ephraim, and his left hand on the firstborn, Manasseh.

Joseph's Intervention and Jacob's Refusal

When Joseph saw his father's right hand resting on the head of the younger son, it deeply displeased him. Thinking the old man's failing eyesight had caused an honest error, Joseph reached out and physically tried to lift his father's hand off Ephraim's head to move it onto Manasseh's head:

> *"And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater*

> *than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."*
> **— Genesis 48:17–19 (KJV)**

Think about the contrast between Isaac's deathbed and Jacob's deathbed. Years earlier, Isaac had been blind and tricked into blessing the younger son against his own wishes, only to tremble exceedingly when he discovered what had happened. Now, Jacob was also blind, yet nobody tricked him. He refused to let Joseph adjust his hands. Calmly, knowingly, and firmly, Jacob answered, 'I know it, my son, I know it.'

Physically blind in a foreign land, Jacob was operating by brilliant spiritual sight. He was not acting on a sudden whim, an emotional impulse, or a new voice in the dark. He was executing a clear assignment driven by deep, long-held confidence in what God had promised him decades earlier.

Jacob then spoke a unified blessing over Joseph and both boys, giving full credit to the faithful God who had shepherded him throughout his entire life:

> *"And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth... And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh."*
> **— Genesis 48:15–16, 20 (KJV)**

CHAPTER FOUR

The Blueprint: The Mirror of Bethel

Where did Jacob get such unshakeable clarity on his deathbed? How could a frail, dying man in Egypt speak with absolute certainty about the tribal destiny of two boys who had never even set foot in the land of Canaan?

The answer lies in the very first words Jacob spoke to Joseph right before he adopted and blessed the boys. On his deathbed, Jacob reached back across the decades of his life to two monumental encounters he had experienced with God at a place originally called Luz, which Jacob had renamed Bethel—meaning 'the House of God.'

> *"And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession."*
> **— Genesis 48:3–4 (KJV)**

Two Encounters at Bethel

Bethel was the spiritual anchor of Jacob's entire life. He first met God at Luz when he was a lonely fugitive running from his brother Esau's wrath, sleeping under the open sky with a stone for a pillow. In a dream of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, God promised to be with him and give the land to his descendants (Genesis 28:10–19).

Decades later, after Jacob returned to Canaan, God instructed him to go back to Bethel, build an altar, and put away all foreign idols. There at Bethel, God appeared to Jacob a second time, confirmed his new name 'Israel,' and laid out the exact blueprint of the covenant:

> *"And God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land."*
> **— Genesis 35:10–12 (KJV)**

Staggering Precision: Comparing Bethel and the Deathbed

When we place what God spoke to Jacob at Bethel side by side with what Jacob did on his deathbed in Genesis 48, the precision is staggering. Jacob's final actions were a perfect mirror image of God's promises at Bethel. Every single element of Jacob's deathbed blessing was drawn directly from God's earlier revelation.

Side-by-Side Comparison: Bethel vs. Jacob's Deathbed

What God Promised at Bethel (Genesis 35)	How Jacob Executed It (Genesis 48)
God introduced Himself as 'God Almighty' (Genesis 35:11), revealing His supreme power to fulfill every word.	Jacob anchored his entire authority to bless in 'God Almighty' (Genesis 48:3), appealing to the same covenant name.
God told Jacob to 'be fruitful and multiply' (Genesis 35:11), promising explosive generational growth.	Jacob trusted God would 'make thee fruitful, and multiply thee' (Genesis 48:4), repeating God's promise verbatim.
God promised a 'company of nations' would come from him (Genesis 35:11), extending far beyond a single clan.	Jacob crossed his hands and prophesied the younger son's seed would become a 'multitude of nations' (Genesis 48:19).
God promised to give the land to his descendants (Genesis 35:12), establishing permanent territorial rights.	Jacob legally adopted Joseph's sons to split the land into tribal shares, calling it an 'everlasting possession' (Genesis 48:4).

This remarkable mirror reveals what real faith actually is. Faith is not guessing, wishing, or inventing promises that God never made. True faith is listening to what God has spoken, guarding His word in your heart through years of trials and delays, and acting upon it with bold obedience when the moment arrives.

Notice also how Jacob ended that deathbed scene according to Hebrews 11:21: 'By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.' Even when his body was too weak to stand unassisted, Jacob leaned on his walking stick and turned his sickbed into a sanctuary of worship—thanking God in advance for promises he knew would surely come to pass.

> *"And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers."*
> **— Genesis 48:21 (KJV)**

CHAPTER FIVE

Legacies Built on the Invisible

Ultimately, why did the New Testament define the deathbed actions of Isaac and Jacob as 'faith'? Because both men were actively managing, dividing, and assigning an inheritance they did not physically possess.

> *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."*
> — Hebrews 11:1 (KJV)

Consider how radically Isaac and Jacob's perspective differed from the way most people measure success. In everyday life, human beings tend to trust only what they can touch, count, and verify right now. By every visible metric, Isaac and Jacob died before the promise arrived.

Three Realities They Could Not See With Physical Eyes

- **They did not own a single acre of the land they were dividing up.** Apart from a burial cave at Machpelah that Abraham had bought for Sarah (Genesis 23:17–20), the patriarchs held no legal title to Canaan. Powerful Canaanite tribes occupied the cities and valleys. Yet Jacob confidently assigned tribal territories across that land as an 'everlasting possession.'
- **They would not live to see their tiny families swell into great nations.** When Jacob entered Egypt, his entire family numbered just seventy souls (Genesis 46:27). They were a small clan of shepherds living as guests in a foreign superpower. Yet Jacob looked at two young grandsons and declared that they would grow into a 'multitude of nations.'
- **Four centuries of waiting still stood between the promise and the fulfillment.** Ahead of Jacob's descendants lay centuries of hard bondage in Egypt, forty years of wandering in the wilderness, and years of conquest under Joshua. Isaac and Jacob knew they would never walk through the settled cities of Israel in their mortal bodies.

Immediately after blessing Manasseh and Ephraim, Jacob gathered all twelve of his sons around his bed to speak prophetic blessings over each of their future tribes (Genesis 49:1–28). Then, with his very last breath, Jacob reinforced his faith in God's promise by

commanding his sons not to bury him in Egypt, but to carry his body back to the land of Canaan:

> *"And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave 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 possession of a buryingplace."*
> **— Genesis 49:29–30 (KJV)**

As Hebrews 11 eloquently concludes, these patriarchs died without holding the physical fulfillment in their hands, yet they saw it clearly from afar and embraced it completely:

> *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country... But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."*
> **— Hebrews 11:13–16 (KJV)**

History's Verdict and Our Own Legacy

Centuries later, every single word spoken from those two deathbeds came to pass with breathtaking accuracy. God delivered Israel from Egypt, brought them into Canaan under Joshua, and divided the land among the tribes. True to Isaac's trembling submission, Jacob's line became the covenant nation through whom Jesus Christ came to bless all families of the earth. True to Jacob's crossed hands, Joseph's two sons became the predecessors of a great nation and company of nations.

> *"There failed not ought of any good thing which the LORD had spoken unto the house of Israel; all came to pass."*
> **— Joshua 21:45 (KJV)**

By passing down these prophetic blessings with their final breaths, Isaac and Jacob proved that God's invisible word was far more real to them than the visible world around them. Their ancient choices leave every reader with a timeless, searching lesson: true legacy is never built on what we can grasp with our hands today, but on what we trust Almighty God to build long after we are gone.