

Hebrews 11:21 (NKJV)

“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

Have you ever paused to wonder why Scripture highlights this detail about Jacob—why it specifically says he leaned on the top of his staff when he worshiped? Why not mention a wall, a bed, or a chair? Why does the Spirit of God preserve this image for us?

Jacob’s final act carried deep, prophetic meaning.

The Cross Foreshadowed

When Jacob blessed Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, he deliberately crossed his hands—placing his right hand on the younger son, Ephraim, and his left hand on the elder, Manasseh (Genesis 48:14). Joseph tried to correct him, but Jacob replied:

Genesis 48:19 (ESV)

“I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also

shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.”

By crossing his hands, Jacob prophetically formed the image of the cross—a mystery that would later be revealed fully in Christ, through whom grace was extended first to the nations (Gentiles). Paul explains this mystery:

Romans 11:11 (NIV)

“Salvation has come to the Gentiles to make Israel envious.”

Jacob’s actions were not accidental; they were Spirit-led.

The Staff: A Symbol of Authority, Shepherding, and Pilgrimage

In Scripture, the staff (or rod) consistently symbolizes three things:

1. **Royal Authority** – Kings carried scepters as symbols of power. The Messiah Himself is prophesied to rule with a rod of iron:
Psalms 2:9 (NKJV) – “You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

2. **The Shepherd's Care** – David rejoiced in the Lord's comfort:

Psalms 23:4 (ESV) – “Your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”

The shepherd's staff guided, corrected, and protected the sheep. For Jacob, the staff testified that he belonged to God as one of His sheep (cf. John 10:11, “I am the good shepherd”).

3. **The Traveler's Journey** – In biblical times, no traveler went on a journey without a staff. When Israel prepared for the Exodus, they were commanded:

Exodus 12:11 (NIV) – “This is how you are to eat it: with your cloak tucked into your belt, your sandals on your feet and your staff in your hand. Eat it in haste; it is the Lord's Passover.”

Likewise, Jesus sent His disciples to preach the kingdom with nothing but a staff in hand:

Mark 6:8 (NKJV) – “He commanded them to take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bag, no bread, no copper in their money belts.”

By leaning on his staff as he worshiped, Jacob was making a statement:

he had lived his entire life as a pilgrim and a stranger on earth.

Living as Pilgrims

The writer of Hebrews reminds us of the mindset of the patriarchs:

Hebrews 11:13 (ESV)

“These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.”

Jacob refused to live as if this world was his permanent home. His staff declared: *“I am only passing through.”*

The apostle Peter affirms the same truth for believers today:

1 Peter 2:11 (NIV)

“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul.”

To carry the staff of God is to live with eternity in view, walking by faith, not by sight (2 Corinthians 5:7).

Christ, Our Shepherd and Our Staff

Ultimately, the staff in Jacob's hand pointed to Christ Himself. He is both the Good Shepherd (John 10:11) and the One who gives us authority to trample on serpents and scorpions (Luke 10:19).

Just as Moses' staff brought deliverance to Israel when stretched over the Red Sea (Exodus 14:16), Christ's cross—the true staff lifted high—brought deliverance to the nations.

A Final Reflection

Jacob's last act was not weakness—it was worship. Leaning on his staff, he testified that his entire life had been upheld by God. His sons may have seen only an old man clinging to a stick, but in truth, he was declaring his faith in the Shepherd who had guided him from beginning to end.

Now, ask yourself:

- Am I walking daily with the Shepherd's staff—Christ Jesus—beside me?
- Do I live as a pilgrim, or as if this world is my permanent home?
- Does my life bear the mark of the cross, as Jacob's did in his blessing?

Every true child of God carries His staff. It is the mark of our identity and the testimony of our journey.

Shalom.

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