

Genesis 46 Jacob Goes to Egypt

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Overview

The third cycle in bringing Jacob's family to Egypt occupies all of Gen 46-50. We see the same themes already encountered in ch. 42 and 43-45:

	42	43-45	46-50
Preparation	1-2	43:1-14	46:1-4
Journey to Egypt	3-5	15	46:5-27
Interaction with Joseph	42:6-25	43:16-45:24	46:31-47:10; 50:14-21
Joseph's bounty to them	25	44:1-5; 45:16-24	47:11-27 (contrast with Egyptians)
Return to Canaan	26-28	45:25	50:7-13
Bowing down to Joseph	6	43:26,28; 44:14	47:31
Joseph's weeping	24	43:30, 45:14, 15	46:29, 50:1, 17

1-4, Preparation for the Journey

Israel took his journey.—The last time this expression occurred (35:21), Rachel had just died, and Israel was on his way to see his father Isaac in Hebron. Now he is on his way to see his son Joseph in Egypt.

came to Beersheba.—This is the first time he has come this far south. Although Isaac occasionally migrated further south than Beersheba (compare 24:62 with 16:14), Beersheba is traditionally regarded as the southern extreme of the promised land (“from Dan even to Beersheba,” Judg 20:1; 1 Sam 3:20; 2 Sam 3:10; etc.). Jacob will recall several elements of his family history as he approaches this point.

- His grandfather Abraham stumbled severely by going further south into Egypt (12:10-20).
- Later, Abraham received an ominous prophecy about four hundred years of bondage in a foreign land (15:13).
- His father Isaac was warned of God not to go into Egypt (26:2).

To go further will be to leave the land to which God has called him, and expose him and his family to dire consequences. So we can imagine that he hesitates when reaching this point. He longs with all his heart to see Joseph—but as Israel, his first allegiance is to the Lord, not to his own desires.

offered sacrifices.—There are three significant things about Israel's sacrifice at Beersheba.

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1. It is the site of Isaac's only recorded altar (26:23-25), at the point at which God confirmed with him the covenant to Abraham. On reaching this location, Israel recalls this crisis in his father's life, and pauses to consider his place as the next link in the chain of promise.
2. This may be one reason that this is described as "sacrificing sacrifices" rather than "building an altar." Perhaps he is using the very altar that Isaac used years before. Almost all worship in Genesis is described in the words, "he built an altar and called on the name of the Lord." Jacob does this also (33:20; 35:7), but here and at 31:54 (after his covenant with Laban) he is said to "sacrifice sacrifice[s]" (singular in 31, plural here). It may be useful to meditate on the differences between the two terms.
 - a. Building an altar leaves a visible witness to the worshiper's devotion to God. This significance is confirmed in the frequent association with the action, "call upon the name of the Lord." Where the sacrifice is described more fully (8:20; 22:2), it is always a whole burnt offering, which represents the dedication of the worshiper to the Lord.
 - b. The phrase "sacrifice sacrifices" is frequently refined elsewhere in scripture to indicate that the sacrifices in question are peace offerings, offered in thanksgiving to God for his gracious gifts (e.g., Exod 24:5; Lev 17:5; 19:5; 1 Sam 10:8; 11:15; 1 Kings 8:63; 2 Chr 30:22; 33:16).
3. Compare this sacrifice with Jacob's previous three.
 - a. The first is the peace offering at Mount Gilead in 31:54. Jacob has not yet wrestled with God, or acknowledge him as his own God at Bethel. He is like an unbeliever who is beginning to be conscious of the Lord's goodness to him. The Lord is not even mentioned in the verse; this is like most Thanksgiving dinners in America, whose participants are only vaguely aware of the one to whom they give thanks.
 - b. Next, he built an altar at Shechem (33:20). It was right that he should build an altar, but he had promised to do this at Bethel (28:22), not Shechem. Now he acknowledges the Lord, but his worship falls short of the form that God has ordained.
 - c. Finally, he fulfills his promise with an altar at Bethel (35:7). This is the point, according to his promise in 28:20-22, at which he takes the Lord as his God.
 - d. The previous sacrifices and altars took place in the context of journeys commanded by God (31:3; 35:1). Now he is on the move again, but has received no divine command. The last time he undertook such a journey (35:16), the result was not blessing, but the death of his favorite wife. This experience makes him extremely apprehensive about this trip. When he reaches Beersheba with its memories of his father's sacrifice, he pauses to give thanks to God for the news about Joseph, and to acknowledge his dependence on the Lord. Here is the believer who is walking daily with the Lord.

Jacob's pause is an example for us in our daily activities, not to forget the Lord, but to "do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him" (Col 3:17).

God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night.—Compare Job 33:14-18,

For God speaketh once, yea twice, *yet man* perceiveth it not. 15 In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falleth upon men, in slumberings upon the bed; 16 Then he openeth the ears of men, and sealet their instruction, 17 That he may withdraw man *from his* purpose,

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and hide pride from man. 18 He keepeth back his soul from the pit, and his life from perishing by the sword.

God graciously honors Jacob’s desire to acknowledge him with a revelation that recalls his dealings with Jacob’s father and grandfather. The summons recalls the confirmation of the covenant with Abraham in Gen 22:11, while the body corresponds line for line with what God said to Isaac at this same place years before (26:24, somewhere between Jacob’s birth and his departure for Haran at age 57; he is now 130, so this is roughly a century before, give or take 20 years). Both also remind Jacob of God’s earlier dealings with himself.

<<Dan 7:7, 13 “night visions” *hezvey leylya’ is the closest; Targum on Gen 46:2 has xazva’ deleylya’; cf. Job 4:13; 20:8; 33:15—in Hebrew, xizzayon is poetic. The xazon of Dan 8:1,2 is called a mar’eh in v.16. Hypothesis: mar’eh is generic, what one sees. The xzh family is explicitly marked to emphasize that the vision is divine in origin, and is particularly appropriate in the case of highly symbolic messages.>>*

Jacob, Jacob ... Here am I.—This is a classic idiom by which one respectfully requests another’s attention (Isaac to Abraham in 22:7; Isaac to Esau in 27:1; Jacob masquerading as Esau to Isaac in 27:18). It is also how God summons his people, usually to a special ministry: Moses (Exod 3:4), Samuel (1 Sam 3:10), and Saul (Acts 9:4).

In Genesis, only two people receive such a divine summons, once with the name mentioned only once, and once with it mentioned twice: Abraham and Jacob. So the *form* of the divine announcement reminds Jacob of his continuity with his grandfather Abraham.

	Single Call	Double Call
Abraham	22:1 Command to offer Isaac	22:11 Command to spare Isaac
Jacob	31:11 Command to return to Canaan (and Esau)	46:2 Command to go to Egypt and see Joseph
Common meaning	Command requires courage to obey; holds prospect of great disaster	Great relief after resolution of what had been a tragedy.

3 And he said.—Compare the blessing that his father Isaac received at Beersheba years before (26:24), and God’s subsequent blessing to Jacob as he left Canaan for Haran (28:12-15).

To Jacob, 28:12-15	To Isaac, 26:24	To Jacob, 46:3-4
12 And he dreamed, ... 13 And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said,	And the LORD appeared unto him the same night, and said,	2 And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said,
		Jacob, Jacob.
		And he said, Here am I.
I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac:	I <i>am</i> the God of Abraham thy father:	I am God, the God of thy father:
	fear not,	fear not to go down into Egypt;
15 And, behold, I am with thee, ... ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.	for I <i>am</i> with thee,	4 I will go down with thee into Egypt;

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the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; 15 ... and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land ...	and will bless thee,	and I will also surely bring thee up again
		and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.
14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.	and multiply thy seed for my servant Abraham's sake.	(3) for I will there make of thee a great nation:

5-27, The Trip to Egypt

We have four statements about the initiative for the trip in 5-7, followed by a genealogy of those who went down.

5-7, The Initiative

Notice the change in the subjects of the verbs.

5a Jacob rose up.—At the start, the focus is all on Jacob. He is the patriarch, and the family moves at his command.

5b-6a the sons of Israel carried Jacob ... and they took—In the next breath, we are reminded that Jacob is old and feeble. He may rise up, but he must be carried. He moves from active to passive as the sons do the actual work of packing up the family.

Note what they pack: not only their family and cattle, but also their goods. This is in spite of Pharaoh's command in 45:20 to "regard not your stuff." Leopold comments on this contrast,

... a true sense of frugality induced Jacob's sons to take along all "their possessions." Perhaps sound common sense taught them to evaluate boastful royal munificence somewhat lightly.

More to the point is the consideration that as godly men Jacob's sons regarded their possessions as good gifts of God, which they did not dare to abandon rashly.

6b [they] came into Egypt.—At first glance, the subject seems to be the same, as the previous clause, but at the end of the verse we are told who the "they" is: "Jacob, and all his seed with him." Having moved from Jacob to the sons, now Moses reintroduces Jacob into the action.

7 His sons ... brought he with him into Egypt.—Finally, the focus returns entirely to Jacob, once more identified as the one directing the movement of the family.

Application: In a well-ordered family, authority is not identical with physical might. Jacob is old and feeble, but he is recognized as the leader of the family and is ultimately responsible for their actions. Such a state of affairs can only be enjoyed if they recognize the position of responsibility in which the Lord has placed him.

8-27, The List of Emigrees

Compare 35:23-26, the list of Jacob's sons when he was reunited with his father Isaac. Now that he is about to rejoin Joseph, we have another accounting, showing how much the family has grown. The next listing of his offspring is in Numbers 26 as they leave Egypt.

There are a number of interesting numerical phenomena around this passage that can be consulted in the commentaries. It will be worthwhile to trace the computations at a high level.

There are three levels of data:

1. The lists of names.
2. The summary counts for each of the four wives (vv. 15, 18, 22, 23).
3. The two overall counts (vv. 26, 27).

Summary Count.—The second summary count (v.27 “70”) is equal to the sum of the counts for the four wives, and includes “all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt.” The first summary count is derived from this by subtracting Jacob himself, Joseph, and his two sons, to give the 66 “that came with Jacob into Egypt” (v.26). Note that Jacob is in the 70, but not in the 66.

Right away, a question arises with regard to Stephen's summary in Acts 7:14, where he speaks of “75.” Two explanations have been advanced.

- Stephen is speaking explicitly of Jacob's “kindred,” exclusive of Joseph and his family, so we should start with the count of 66 and find nine more. The usual solution is to count nine patriarchal wives: Judah's wife is dead, Joseph's is in Egypt, and Simeon's last wife (v.10) is by a Canaanite woman.
- It is simpler to observe that Stephen's sermon often follows the LXX in its differences with MT, and the LXX has a grand total of 75 in v.27, achieved by including five grandsons and great-grandsons of Joseph in v.20. (Interestingly, the LXX augments Rachel's wife total in v.22 by only four, not five, but the sum of names still comes out to 75.)

Application.—The discrepancy with Stephen is illustrative of the attitude of the NT saints, particularly Hellenistic ones, toward the LXX. They considered it Scripture and fully authoritative. There is great value in being able to study the Scriptures in their original languages, but no Christian should ever feel that they do not have direct and personal access to the Word of God. It is wonderful if you can learn Hebrew and Greek. If not, resolve to know your English Bible thoroughly, and don't be afraid to base your life on it (with prayerful dependence on the Holy Spirit).

The number 70, while literally defensible, also has a strong symbolic message. Genesis 10 listed seventy nations in the world after the flood. John Sailhammer:

Just as the 'seventy nations' represent all the descendants of Adam, so now the 'seventy sons' represent all the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the children of Israel. Here in narrative form is a demonstration of the theme in Deuteronomy 32:8 that God apportioned the boundaries of the nations (Ge 10) according to the number of the children of Israel. Thus the writer has gone to great lengths to portray the new nation of Israel as a new humanity and Abraham as a second Adam. The blessing that is to come through Abraham and his seed is a restoration of the original blessing of Adam, a blessing which was lost in the Fall."

Wife Counts.—Now consider the counts for each wife. If we count the names for the descendants of each wife, we get the total assigned for that wife, except in the case of Leah. She has 34 names, including six sons, one daughter, 25 sons, and two grandsons, but the total reads (in the AV), “all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three.”

- Many critics assume that the number is wrong and the author can't count (at least not as high as 33).
- Some think that Dinah is excluded from the total. But that disagrees with the explicit reference to “daughters” in v.15, and Asher's daughter Serah is counted in v.17.
- The author explicitly notes that Er and Onan died in Canaan (v.12), so they should not be included in the grand total of v.27. But then the total of v.15 is too high by one, not too low by one.

The solution probably lies in recalling that the total of 70 (v.27) equals the sum of the four wife totals, and includes Jacob. This means that Jacob must be included in one of the wife totals. Most likely, he is the extra person in Leah's 33. Literally, the summary phrase of v.15 reads, not “all the souls of his sons and his daughters,” but “all the souls, his sons and his daughters,” leaving open the possibility that what is being counted is the total family unit, *including* sons and daughters but also Jacob.

If so, this is another indication of the honor that God gives to poor despised Leah. She is named first, she has the most children, and Jacob is enumerated with her part of the family. However, of the four mothers named in this list, only Rachel (v.19) is called “Jacob's wife.” This tension shows that the conflict between Leah and Rachel persists even over the 6+ decades since Jacob married them, and reminds us of the unhappiness that results when people violate God's pattern in Eden of one man and one woman.

Individual Names.—Some of the individuals included in the list seem anomalous, given the summary in vv.26-27 that these “came into Egypt.”

- Ephraim and Manasseh are included, even though Moses explicitly notes (v.20) that they were born in Egypt, and so did not physically migrate from Canaan to Egypt.
- Some of the others here may have been born in Egypt as well. Key candidates:
 - The sons of Pharez (v.12)—Pharez was born to Judah well into Joseph's 22 year exile, and would be unlikely to have his own children by this time
 - The “sons” of Benjamin (v.21), some of whom are identified as grandsons in Num 26:38-40; Joseph is 39 at this point and Benjamin is younger
 - More generally, this list includes all the heads of families listed in Num 26 at the time of the Exodus (other than the grandsons of Joseph, which may be why the LXX pulls them in), suggesting that some others born in Egypt may be listed here as well.

Why does the author consider that these “came into Egypt”? Gill suggests that all those born during Jacob's lifetime were counted as part of his household and thus reckoned as the “first generation.” The point of the list thus appears to be to emphasize that those who became heads of the clans at the time of the Exodus were not to be considered Egyptian, but reckoned with those who went down into Egypt with Jacob, though some of them did so “in the loins of their fathers” (cf. Heb 7:10). See K&D on this passage and the comparison with Num 26.

Application: During their time in Egypt, the nation retained very strongly two notions:

1. They were “the house of Jacob,” an integrated family.
2. They “came into Egypt.” It was not their home, but only a temporary refuge.

These notions were solidified in the nation’s memory by fixing the family clans at this time.

28-30, Reunion with Joseph

28 And he sent Judah.—Judah’s rise to preeminence in the family is now confirmed by his father’s appointment of him as the one to notify Joseph of his arrival. In these days before telephones and regularly scheduled public transit, Joseph would have no way of knowing when his family would arrive, other than a messenger.

29 And Joseph made ready his chariot.—*Not necessarily personally; the active (Qal) is used even of a king (Exod 14:6; 1 Kings 18:44), and the Hiphil is unattested.*

Joseph ... presented himself unto him.—Lit., “appeared unto him.” Elsewhere in Genesis, when this verb takes a personal subject, the subject is always the Lord (12:7; 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; 35:1, 9; 48:3). Joseph’s appearance, in a royal chariot and wearing his stately robes, made an overpowering impression on aged Jacob.

he ... wept on his neck a good while.—Probably, we are to understand the subject here to be Joseph, who throughout this history is prone to weeping. He wears his wealth and power lightly, and is not ashamed to show affection to his father.

30 Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.—Jacob can now die in peace, because everything for which he felt responsible is now settled.

- He distrusted his sons (45:26), and may have suspected that they dealt ill with Joseph. How could such sons deliver the blessing of Abraham? But now the breach has been overcome. Through Joseph’s bold and loving discipline, they have been reformed, and are changed men.
- Joseph was the one on whom the promises rested, according to his early dreams. If he is dead, is the promise cut off? But he is alive; God’s promises are true after all.
- The famine must have weighed heavily on Jacob, as the one responsible for providing for his family. Now he sees Joseph in a position to provide for the family’s needs, and he is confident that they will be fed.

Our lives sometimes feel as conflicted and confused as Jacob’s. We may think as we read his words to Joseph, “How wonderful it would be if there were someone who could make everything right for me, as Joseph could for Jacob.”

In fact, there is. Two episodes, nearly two millennia later, echo this one when people encounter the Lord Jesus.

- At the beginning of our Lord’s earthly life, godly Simeon met him as an infant in the temple, Luke 2:28-30. Simeon, seeing him born, felt that all was well. In spite of the Roman occupation, God’s promises were true. His Messiah had come, and would save his people from their sins.

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- Simeon could little suspect the rejection that his countrymen would heap on the Messiah. When the Lord died on the tree, his disciples were disheartened and scattered, just as Jacob was when he felt that Joseph had been slain. See Luke 24:13-24. But he rose from the dead, and when they encountered him after his resurrection, they were filled with joy: John 20:19-29.

There is a further parallel between Jacob’s encounter with Joseph and our encounter with the Lord. Jacob had to submit himself to Joseph’s authority and provision. He had to leave his home and become a stranger in a strange land. So too, the forgiveness and provision that the Lord Jesus gives us must be received. We must repent of our sin and receive the Lord. This will make us, too, strangers from the world, pilgrims and aliens, but we will have the joy of sin forgiven and the assurance of everlasting life.

31-47:10, Israel and Pharaoh

The interaction between Joseph’s family and Pharaoh has two parts, which contrast with each other.

1. He deals with the disposition of the family as a whole, securing Pharaoh’s permission for them to live in Goshen. A key element of his strategy is the *humble* position that the family takes, according to the standards of Egyptian society.
2. He introduces Jacob to Pharaoh. This interaction emphasizes the spiritual *superiority* of Jacob to Pharaoh.

46:31-47:6 The Humble Shepherds meet Pharaoh

This section is an “execution paragraph.” It begins with a detailed description of what will happen, in three steps, and then relates the execution of those same three steps. See the table for the correspondence.

	Planning	Execution
Joseph's Preparation	31 And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me; 32 And the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have.	47:1 Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they are in the land of Goshen .

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<p>The Brothers' Conduct</p>	<p>33 And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? 34 That ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers:</p>	<p>2 And he took some of his brethren, even five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. 3 And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What is your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants are shepherds, both we, and also our fathers. 4 They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine is sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen.</p>
<p>The Objective</p>	<p>that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.</p>	<p>5 And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: 6 The land of Egypt is before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest any men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.</p>

46:31-32, 47:1, Joseph's Preparation—First, Joseph will go to Pharaoh to report the arrival of his brothers. He will explicitly bring up the matter of their occupation as shepherds in this introduction, and will emphasize that they have brought their flocks with them and so intend to continue this profession in Egypt.

We will learn in v.34 that this profession is not esteemed by the Egyptians. Their society was built around agriculture and the flooding of the Nile that supported it; shepherds were nomads, barbaric, uncouth. Perhaps this sensitivity is what led to the separate seating of Joseph's brothers from the Egyptians back in ch. 43 on their second visit.

Joseph does not try to hide this characteristic of his family, but announces it up front to Pharaoh. He also tells Pharaoh that he has settled them in Goshen. The repetition of this term is a consistent feature of the execution half of this section, and reflects Joseph's original plan (45:10). It is the easternmost section of arable land in Egypt, bordering the desert of Sinai. Thus it is close to Canaan, and as far removed from the priestly centers along the upper Nile as possible.

46:33-34a, 47:2-4, The Brothers meet Pharaoh.—When the brothers come before Pharaoh, they report as instructed. They have not come to mooch off the land, but only seeking pasture for their flocks, and their stay will be temporary ("sojourn"). They represent themselves as nomads seeking permission to graze in Egypt for a while, during the famine.

46:34b; 47:5-6, The Objective.—Joseph's objective in representing them as shepherds was to justify their settlement in Goshen: it is on the border, and will not require them to mix extensively with the Egyptian population. Pharaoh accepts this disposition, and authorizes their residence in Goshen. V.6 does not necessarily mean that he considers Goshen to be "the best of the land of Egypt." He is rather saying, "As far as I am concerned, they may settle anywhere they want, even in the best of the land. If Goshen suits their needs, fine, let them settle there."

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The invitation for Joseph's family to care for Pharaoh's own herds reflects later Egyptian history. Wenham claims (quoting Sarna) that Raamses III employed 3264 men, mostly foreigners, to care for his herds—foreigners because no self-respecting Egyptian would want to do the work of a shepherd.

The seclusion of Israel in Goshen is crucial to God's purposes. It isolates them from the main stream of Egyptian population and the priestly centers on the central Nile. They can grow into a nation while retaining their distinctive identity, without the corruption that Canaan had already begun to insinuate among them. Joseph wisely realizes that the esteem of men is worthless if it leads to worldly corruption, and it is "Better ... *to be* of an humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Proverbs 16:19), on which Matthew Henry: "Humility, though it should expose us to contempt in the world, yet while it recommends us to the favour of God, qualifies us for his gracious visits, prepares us for his glory, secures us from many temptations, and preserves the quiet and repose of our own souls, is much better than that high-spiritedness which, though it carry away the honour and wealth of the world, makes God a man's enemy and the devil his master."

The Scriptures repeatedly warn us of the danger of seeking the world's respect.

Hebrews 13:12 Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. 13 Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

James 4:4 Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

Matthew 5:11 Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

1 Corinthians 4:10 We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but ye *are* wise in Christ; we *are* weak, but ye *are* strong; ye *are* honourable, but we *are* despised. 11 Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace; 12 And labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: 13 Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, *and are* the offscouring of all things unto this day.

2 Corinthians 12:10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

The Lord commanded his disciples (Matthew 16:24), "If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." Following Christ involves a decision to choose him before the world. Joseph is challenging his brothers to follow this principle: to be willing to be considered second class citizens in Egypt, so that they might remain pleasing to God.

7-10, The Godly Patriarch meets Pharaoh

While Jacob's family is humble in the things of man, they are conscious of their exalted position before the Lord. After his brothers meet Pharaoh, Joseph brings in his father.

Joseph brought in Jacob ... and set him.—Lit, “stood him up.” Jacob is so old and feeble that he must be carried into Pharaoh's presence.

Note how the interview begins and ends, then consider the exchange in the middle.

7, 10, Jacob blessed Pharaoh.—What can this lowly shepherd, forced into exile by famine, have to offer the king of fruitful Egypt? One might expect him to be obsequious and overawed. But instead, he recognizes that his God is greater than the gods of Egypt. He remembers from the promise to his fathers that he and his seed are to be a blessing to all nations, and so this first time that he comes before a pagan monarch, he offers that blessing to him.

Heb 7:7, “the less is blessed of the better.” With respect to the things of God, Jacob is far superior to Pharaoh, in that confidence offers his blessing. Leupold: “Conscious that he, a true child of God, has more to offer by his blessing than any earthly monarch can offer him, Jacob here blesses as by an act and a display of true faith.”

8 How old art thou?—The Egyptians have always been preoccupied with antiquity. Jacob, having lived as a nomad and a shepherd, was weather-beaten and probably looked much older than he was, a state confirmed by his infirmity. Recall his comment to Laban in 31:40, describing the life of a shepherd: “in the day the drought consumed me, and the frost by night; and my sleep departed from mine eyes.”

9 Jacob said.—Note two things about Jacob's response.

First, he does not describe himself as “thy servant,” as the brothers did during their audience, but simply uses the first person “my.” He is not impressed with human titles or positions, as we have already seen in his awareness that Pharaoh, like any other person, depends on divine blessing.

Second, his response is surprisingly sober for one who has just presumed to bless the king of Egypt.

- He describes his life and that of his fathers as a “pilgrimage.” He has found no place to which he really belongs. Abraham described himself in these terms in 23:4 when he purchased Sarah's grave (“I am a stranger and a sojourner with you”—“stranger” is the same root as “pilgrimage”), and the brothers make the same claim in 47:4 when they say that they have come to “sojourn” in the land (again, the same root as “pilgrimage”). The psychology behind this claim is unpacked by the writer to the Hebrews (11:13-16):

13 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. 14 For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that *country* from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. 16 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.

- His days have been “few and evil.”

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- “Few” in comparison with his fathers; Abraham died at 175 (25:7), and Isaac at 180 (35:28); Jacob is now only 130, and will die at 147 (47:28).
- “Evil” in recognition of the difficulties through which God has brought him: strife in his parental home, abuse and deception by Laban, strife between his wives, the rape of his daughter, the viciousness of Simeon and Levi, the loss of Rachel, Reuben’s rape of his handmaid, the apparent death of Joseph, and now famine that forces him to leave the land of promise. All of these were necessary for God to form him and his family; but subjectively, all were unpleasant and “evil.”

Alter notes with profound insight that Jacob has “achieved everything that he aspired to achieve: the birthright, the blessing, marriage with his beloved Rachel, progeny, and wealth. But ... the consequence is far more pain than contentment.” As with Israel in the desert, lusting for meat, “he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul” (Psa 106:15). What Jacob desired in the flesh, in the end he declares to be “evil.” Compare Paul’s confession in Phil 3:7, “What things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.”

Contrast Jacob’s negative assessment of this life with the blessing that he offers Pharaoh. He can be realistic about the difficulties of this life, without being discouraged. His attitude is very much that of Paul in 2 Cor 4:7-11:

7 But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. 8 *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; 9 Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; 10 Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. 11 For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.

The whole exchange is a model for us of our position in an unbelieving world. We should not be ashamed to occupy positions of low status, recognizing that in what matters, we are children of the king. Our nobility comes not from our worldly status, but from our heavenly position.

47:11-27 The Fate of Israel and the Egyptians

This section is a chiasm, with a description of Israel’s prosperity wrapped around the dire conditions of the Egyptians.

11-12, Israel’s Prosperity

The repetition of Joseph’s name indicates that two distinct actions are being described.

11 Joseph placed ... gave them a possession.—“Placed” means “caused to dwell.” The noun “possession” goes further; it indicates legal title to property. This is what Abraham purchased from the sons of Heth to bury Sarah (23:4, 9, 20), and what God promised to make all of Canaan to Abraham and his seed (17:8). They are not treated as nomads, but are given legal title to their homesteads. At this point, they have more of a legal claim to the land of their exile than they do to the land that God has promised them!

12 Joseph nourished his father ...—The verb indicates ongoing sustenance. He provided regularly for their needs.

Both of these provisions, land and food, put Israel in a privileged condition compared with the Egyptians, as the following narrative shows.

13-26, The Egyptians' Poverty

In contrast with Israel's family, the famine impoverishes the Egyptians (and those who remained in Canaan as well—note the references to the impact on Canaan in vv. 13, 14, 15). These verses trace their descent in three steps.

13-14, Poverty.—As we noted in 41:56, Joseph did not distribute the grain for free, but charged for it. Eventually, the Egyptians and Canaanites have spent all of their money for food. Contrast his treatment of his own family, whom he does not charge for food, but rather sustains them at his own expense (v.12).

Joseph does not abuse his position of power, but delivers the money “into Pharaoh's house.”

15-17, Loss of Livestock.—When the Egyptians' money is exhausted, Joseph barter grain for their flocks and herds. Here also there is a contrast with Israel, for they brought their flocks into Egypt, and are allowed to retain them.

18-26, Loss of Land.—As the famine continues, the people become desperate. All that they have left is their bodies (lit. “our corpses”) and their fields. Vv. 20 and 21 show that Joseph takes over both of these. He takes possession of their land, and relocates them (probably to emphasize that their bonds with their ancestral lands have been broken). The only exceptions are the priests (mentioned in v.22), and Israel, who in fact have been given permanent possessions upon their settling.

The people are required to work the land and pay a double tithe. In effect, the temporary tax that they paid in preparation for the famine (41:34) is now made permanent.

27, Israel's Prosperity

This verse repeats the three themes from 11-12.

Israel dwelt.—This is the same verb as “placed” in v.11. Joseph caused them to dwell, and they dwelt there.

They had possessions.—This picks up “possession” in v.11, and reemphasizes that Israel gained land from the famine, while the rest of the Egyptians lost their land.

They ... grew, and multiplied.—This is the result of the sustenance with which Joseph provided them on an ongoing basis.

Thus, when Israel enters Egypt, they are free and the Egyptians are enslaved, a situation that will be reversed 400 years later under a different Pharaoh. One can imagine that their privileged position here may well have stimulated bitterness that leads at least in part to that later persecution.

Application: How do you feel about Joseph's preferential treatment of his family? Was it unfair for him to favor them so greatly above the Egyptians? Isn't this just the natural consequence of being family?

Our culture is so obsessed with “fairness” that we are in danger of devaluing the special relationships that make society work. It is not wrong to favor one's family over outsiders, or to

favor believers over unbelievers. Love is selective; it plays favorites. Imagine how your spouse would feel if you said, “Honey, I love you. Of course, I’ve got to be fair, so I love all the other girls just as much.”

Too often Christians extend this inappropriate notion of fairness to God. It is not wrong for him to treat his people preferentially. See Isa 43:1-4 for a concise description of how he sacrificed other nations for them. It is interesting that he starts with Egypt, which both at the beginning and at the end of the sojourn suffered for Israel’s sake.

Believer, rejoice in God’s undeserved grace toward you. His dealings with you are like the dealings of the bridegroom toward the bride, measured not by fairness but by love, and supported by the unlimited power of the creator of the universe. Rom 8:35-39: “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?³⁶ As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.³⁸ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” “More secure is no one ever, than the loved ones of the Saviour.”

47:28-50:13, The Passing of Israel

This section is chiasitic:

Burial in Canaan	Commanded and promised, 47:29-31	Fulfilled, 50:1-13
Jacob on his bed	48:1-2	49:33-50:1
Blessing on the sons	Joseph’s sons, 48:3-22	Jacob’s sons, 49:1-32

28 seventeen years.—So the time Jacob had with Joseph after their reunion was the same he had with him before his exile (37:2).

29-31, The Final Promise: Burial in Canaan

Notice both the content of this request, its seriousness, and the manner in which it is phrased.

Content.—Jacob recognizes that he will shortly die. He does not want to be buried in a strange land, but insists that Joseph enter into a solemn oath to return his body to Canaan for burial. This is a sign of his love for the land that God had promised his people, and of his faith in the promise of God to bring him back to the land (46:4). Like the previous two episodes in which Joseph’s family comes to Egypt, this one will also end with a return to Canaan. Moses is emphasizing that the migration is temporary, and is already looking forward to the return.

Seriousness.—Recall comments on 24:2, the only other oath made with the hand under the thigh. “The word “thigh” can be used euphemistically for the loins, cf. Gen 46:26; Ex 1:5. Understood in this way, such an oath is viewed as binding the one who takes the oath not only to the lord who imposes it, but also to his offspring. ... The oath is being required by an old man

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who may die ... before the promised action is completed. The offspring will have to oversee the execution of the promise.”

Manner.—We might expect Jacob, as the aged patriarch, to assert his superiority as head over the family to Joseph. Quite the contrary, he is submissive and acknowledges Joseph’s superiority to him, in two ways.

- 29, The clause “If I have found grace in thy sight” is a clear sign of deference. It is always addressed by an inferior to a superior, by one who is unworthy to one who is in a position to give grace. Instances of “find grace” in Genesis:
 - 6:8, Noah from God
 - 18:3, Abraham to the Lord who appeared to him
 - 30:27, Laban to Jacob (unusual, because up to now Laban has been in control, but he is at risk of losing Jacob)
 - 32:6; 33:8,10,15 Jacob to Esau, fawningly obsequious and fearful for his life
 - 34:11, Shechem to Jacob and his sons, seeking the hand of Dinah
 - 47:25, the brothers to Joseph
 - 50:4, Joseph to Pharaoh, seeking permission to bury his father in Canaan
- 31, The clause “Israel bowed himself” is usually understood as though Israel is thanking God that he will be returned to Canaan. This interpretation misses an important point. The verb here is the same one that has described the family’s obeisance to Joseph in dreams of 37:7,9, and that has appeared repeatedly as the brothers appear before Joseph (42:6; 43:26, 28). Joseph’s second dream included his parents as the sun and moon, and at that time Jacob asked him, “Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?” (37:9). The dream was a revelation from the Lord, and the answer is “Yes.” At this point Israel finally accepts fully the implications of the dream, and does obeisance to his son.

This episode culminates a recurrent theme in Jacob’s life. He started out as an arrogant, aggressive, grasping young man, tricking his brother out of the birthright and his father out of the blessing. God’s dealings with him have repeatedly humbled him, showing him that promotion comes from the Lord, not from self-advancement: Psa 75:6,7, “For promotion *cometh* neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. 7 But God *is* the judge: he putteth down one, and setteth up another.”

- He tricked Esau, but Laban out-tricked him.
- He stole the blessing from Esau, but later offers to return it (33:11 “take my blessing that is brought to thee”)
- He accepts his sons’ counsel about returning to Egypt for grain (43:1-11)
- Now he bows to Joseph, as prophesied in the dream.

The episode does not mean that in general parents should be submissive to their children. But it does show how God can reverse any established pattern of authority, and warns us against giving

too much credence to human titles and positions. We should always be ready for him to make his will clear to us through people to whom we might consider ourselves superior.

48:1-2, Jacob ill, on his bed

48:1 And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

One told Joseph.—Contrast this impersonal construction with Jacob’s explicit summons to his other sons (49:1). This contrast emphasizes Joseph’s deep love for his father, so that he takes the initiative to visit him when he is ill. Calvin: “Joseph ... regarded it as a greater privilege to be a son of Jacob, than to preside over a hundred kingdoms.”

He took with him.—Joseph himself is a model of filial piety, and he here instructs his children by example. He does not tell them, “Go visit your grandfather.” Nor does he, knowing that his father is ill, try to spare them the ugly details of old age. He involves them in his own daily activities, which is the best way to instruct children.

In picturing this scene, we should keep in mind that these sons are mature young men. They were born (41:50) before the years of famine came, during the seven years of plenty. When Jacob came into Egypt, two years of famine had past (45:6), so they were at least two. Jacob was 130 at this point (47:9), and this is seventeen years later, when he is 147 (47:28), so the boys are at least 19, just a few years older than Joseph when he was sold into slavery.

Israel strengthened himself.—Israel, for his part, draws great encouragement from the visit of his son. We have here an indication of the positive gift we can give the sick by visiting them in love. Visiting the afflicted is a NT virtue (James 1:27 “visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction” is “pure religion and undefiled”; Matt 25:36 “I was sick and you visited me”), and perhaps one that we tend to neglect.

48:3-22, Jacob Adopts Joseph’s Sons

Although Jacob did not summon Joseph, he has been thinking about him, the dreams that he fulfilled, and the dreams that remained frustrated. He has resolved to adopt Joseph’s two sons as his own. The point of Jacob’s action in these verses is to elevate Ephraim and Manasseh from being Joseph’s sons to being counted as peers with Jacob’s other eleven sons. In this section he first declares and explains what he wishes to do, then actually performs the adoption, and finally deals with a side-effect of this legal action.

3-7, Adoption Announced and Justified

The announcement is in the middle (vv. 5-6), surrounded chiastically by the justification.

5, thy two sons ... they shall be mine.—The adoption itself is announced in v.5. Jacob names his first two sons, Reuben and Simeon, as an example.

6, thy issue.—Jacob anticipates that Joseph may have other children. If he does, they will be considered Joseph’s offspring, but when they return to Canaan, they will inherit from the property assigned to their elder brothers. Thus Joseph himself will not have a separate portion;

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instead, his two eldest sons will inherit on equal terms with his brothers. (We have no record of any further offspring being born to Joseph.)

The verses on either side give Jacob’s two motives for this adoption: God’s promise of numerous descendants, and the premature death of Rachel, while still of childbearing age. These two motives are connected.

3-4, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz.—God appeared twice to Jacob at Luz, once in 28:13-15 when he was fleeing Canaan for Haran, and again at 35:10-12 after his return. On both occasions God promised him fruitfulness and the land. This citation refers to the second, not the first, appearance, as seen by several features (see following table):

- God’s self-identification as “God Almighty” *El Shaddai*, which was not used in ch. 28;
- The order of the promises (seed before land, where 28 has land before seed);
- The expressions “fruitful and multiply” and the term *qahal* “company, multitude” applied to his offspring.

It is important to notice that this promise comes after he has returned from Haran, after all but one of his sons have been born, and while Rachel is perhaps carrying Benjamin, the last. Even with twelve sons, God promises Jacob that there are more to come.

28:13-15	35:10-12	48:4
	Thy name <i>is</i> Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel.	
I <i>am</i> the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac:	11a And God said unto him, I <i>am</i> God Almighty:	
the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed;	12 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.	4b and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.
14 And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south:	11b be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations <i>q:hal goyim</i> shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins;	4a Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people <i>q:hal (ammim</i> ,
and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.		
15 And, behold, I <i>am</i> with thee, and will keep thee in all <i>places</i> whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done <i>that</i> which I have spoken to thee of.		

7, Rachel died.—In spite of the promise that God made at Bethel, Rachel died in childbirth soon after the family left Bethel on its way to Hebron to reunite with Isaac. She was apparently the last remaining wife, or at least the last one able to bear children, and her passing left Jacob without the additional children God had promised him at Bethel. So he now claims Joseph’s sons as his own.

Application: There is a little glimmer here of the Jacob of ch. 25, 27, who values the promise of God so highly that he takes action in his own strength to make it come true! (His bargain with

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Esau and his deception of his father were attempts on his part to secure what God had promised him in 25:23.) But what a difference in how he goes about it!

- There, he took from another; here, he gives.
- There, his action was marked by deception and fraud. Here, it is completely open and transparent.
- There, it took the form of human actions and rested for its success on human cunning. Here, it invokes divine blessing and rests on divine strength.

Jacob's whole life teaches us that we should value and pursue God's blessings. The contrast between his early life and his later life shows us the right and the wrong way to exercise that desire.

8-20, Adoption Executed

Now Israel blesses Joseph's sons. With Waltke, it is attractive to see this as the adoption ceremony. Such an explanation sees greater coherence in the text than treating them as disjoint actions. Waltke does not justify this explanation, but we can support it by observing numerous parallels between this passage and the Isaac's blessing on Jacob, the first detailed description of a patriarchal blessing on a son (see table). It would be Joseph's place as the father to give such a blessing to his sons. By giving this blessing, Jacob is exercising the prerogative of a father.

Isaac blesses Jacob, 27	Jacob blesses Joseph's Sons, 48
:18, who art thou?	:8, who are these?
:19 I <i>am</i> Esau thy firstborn	:9 They <i>are</i> my sons
:20 the LORD thy God brought <i>it</i> to me	:9 whom God hath given me in this <i>place</i>
:25 Bring <i>it</i> near to me, ... that my soul may bless thee.	:9 Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them.
:27, and he came near and kissed him	:10, and he brought them near unto him, and he kissed them
:27 and blessed him	:15 and he blessed Joseph

8 Who are these?—The query seems strange. Jacob must have met Joseph's sons before, and they have just been talking about them. Possible explanations for this query, ordered from least likely to most likely. (Maybe cover only the first and last in the sermon...)

- The critics see a clumsy combination of two different accounts. Even if multiple sources were involved, the current state of the text shows a much more careful arrangement of the material than this assessment recognizes.
- There may be a link to 33:5—Esau asked Jacob this question when they were reunited after his years in Haran, and now he asks Joseph the same question about the sons born to him in Egypt. In both cases the parent is acknowledging God's gracious provision during a time of exile. (But this parallel would be stronger if the query were at the time of their reunion, rather than 17 years later, and it does not explain why Jacob asks the question only in the middle of the interview.)

- Perhaps dim-eyed Israel (v.10) has not noticed the children until now. But it would seem that the presence of the children stimulated his announcement of the adoption.
- Waltke suggests that this is a part of the adoption ritual, just as in christening the clergyman asks, “What name is to be given to this child?” or in marriage, “Who giveth this woman to be married unto this man?” The weakness of this view is that we do not have evidence for adoption ceremonies elsewhere, so we don’t know if they included such a question.
- Closely related to this view is the observation that Jacob may be recalling his own blessing by Isaac, when the father asked each of his sons, “Who art thou?” (27:18, 32). That question must have been burned into his memory, since it was the point at which he most explicitly deceived Isaac. Now, as he is about to bestow a paternal blessing on these boys, that scene replays itself in his mind, and he finds himself following the same script.

9 They are my sons.—Jacob had answered falsely, “I am Esau, thy firstborn.” Joseph answers truly, “They are my sons.” Jacob has announced that he intends to adopt Joseph’s sons, and Joseph’s answer identifies them as the intended recipients of this boon.

Whom God hath given me in this place.—Joseph gives glory to God for giving them to him. This is consistent with his continuous pattern of acknowledging the Lord’s hand upon him:

- to the king’s officials in prison, 41:8;
- to Pharaoh, 41:16;
- to the brothers, explaining his leniency, 42:18;
- to his father, explaining his position, 45:9.

Joseph manifests the principle of Col 3:17, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.” Whether a prisoner or a prince, he recognizes that all that he has comes from God, and he bears witness of that to unbelievers.

His statement also provides another echo of ch. 27. When Isaac asks Jacob (whom he takes to be Esau) how Jacob has found the game so quickly, Jacob responds, “the Lord thy God brought it to me” (v.20).

Bring them unto me and I will bless them.—Jacob’s request for the children echoes Isaac’s request for Jacob to “bring it [the food] near to me ... that my soul may bless thee” (v.25).

10 he brought them near ... he kissed them.—The blessing continues to play out the script of Jacob’s blessing by Isaac, 27:27.

11 I had not thought.—Israel is overwhelmed with joy as he embraces his grandchildren. His expression of thanksgiving reminds us of Eph 3:20, how God is “able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.” Though he may chastise us, his love is unbounded toward us.

12 Joseph brought them out ... bowed himself.—Joseph’s sign of reverence toward his father reminds us of the respect due from children to their parents. It is especially meaningful because of the prophecy, fulfilled in 47:31, that the father would bow to the son. In earthly status, Joseph far exceeds his father, but in spiritual status, he recognizes Jacob’s superior position. “The less is

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blessed of the greater” (Heb 7:7). Jacob has declared his intention to bless Joseph’s children, and Joseph here acknowledges Jacob’s right to give such a blessing. Clarke observes that God calls himself the God of Jacob (some 25 times in Scripture); he is never called the God of Joseph.

Joseph then presents his sons for the promised blessing, taking care to put Manasseh, the elder, toward Israel’s right hand in the place of priority. But Israel, anticipating Joseph’s action, crosses his hands, giving priority to Ephraim. When Joseph protests (v.17), Jacob indicates that his action is deliberate, based on knowledge God has given him of the future of the two boys. In fact, Ephraim was the dominant tribe of the north, and its name is sometimes used for the entire northern kingdom, Isa 7:1-9.

The actual blessing comes in two stages: first, a prayer to the Lord (15-16); second, a prophecy (20).

15 he blessed Joseph.—Note that the blessing is said to come on Joseph. He is honored in his sons.

This first, prayer-blessing has three requests.

God ... bless the lads.—The first is adorned with a three-fold description of the one to whom he prays for this blessing. This three-fold description relates God’s increasingly intimate protection of his people, and describes three roles that he fills.

1. He judges all that his people do. Abraham and Isaac walked before him, that is, in his sight. (See notes on 5:22ff for distinctions among “walk with,” “walk before,” “walk after,” “walk in my xxx.”) Of course, he is conscious of all that anyone does, but the expression denotes the recognition by Abraham and Isaac that they were answerable to God. By asking this God to bless Ephraim and Manasseh, he is reminding them that they too should live in the consciousness of God’s judgment.
2. He not only judges his people, but he also shepherds them. This is the fuller sense of “fed me.” Jacob was an expert shepherd, and it is appropriate that here he introduces for the first time in Scripture this lovely metaphor of the Lord as the shepherd of his people (an image that he will repeat in 49:24).
3. Finally, he is the redeeming angel. This is an extremely powerful image.
 - “Angel” in the singular in Genesis is always the angel of the Lord, who is identified with the Lord himself. Jacob himself encountered God in this form in 31:11 (cf. v.13) while he was in Haran. Yet the word itself means “messenger,” and suggests someone sent out from God. How can one who is God be sent out from God? We find the ultimate answer to this question in the NT revelation that God became man in the Lord Jesus. His goings forth have been from of old, even from everlasting (Micah 5), and Jacob was the beneficiary of his ministry.
 - His distinctive work is to redeem from evil. “Redeem” *ga)al* is the term that Moses will later use to describe the work of the kinsman redeemer, responsible for avenging someone who has been murdered, or for buying back a person or his property from bondage. God is said to “redeem from” bad things elsewhere in the OT only in the Psalms: 103:4; 106:10; 107:2. Jacob knew from experience how important this was. It was only the Lord who preserved him from Esau’s jealousy, and from Laban’s deception, and from the Canaanites after his sons so cruelly slew the people of Shechem. Note that

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the redeemer does not stop bad things from happening; he recovers his people from their effect. Jacob's experience (like that of his father and grandfather before him) reminds us that God's purpose is not to spare us suffering, but through suffering to lead us from sin into godliness.

So the first, general prayer for blessing embodies a desire that Ephraim and Manasseh will recognize the Lord as their judge and enjoy his shepherding care and his redemptive power.

let my name be named on them.—This is the language of adoption. He desires that they be counted as his offspring.

let them grow into a multitude.—Finally, he prays that they may flourish, and be a significant part of the great seed promised to the patriarchs. In fact, in the first census at the exodus, together they are second in number only to Judah, and in the second census they outnumber any other tribe.

20 he blessed them that day.—The second blessing is phrased as a prediction rather than a request, a promise that their prosperity will become proverbial in Israel. Note the singular, “In thee”—is the antecedent here again Joseph, so that the blessing is coming on Joseph in the person of his sons (as in v.15)?

Again, we see an echo of Jacob's earlier days. Once, he deceived his father into blessing the younger son instead of the elder, to enforce a divine prophecy that Isaac chose to ignore. Now, he himself, sensitive to divine guidance, gives a blessing to the younger son instead of the elder. The action is similar, but the motives are completely different.

21-22, Joseph's Portion

Under the terms of v.6, Joseph would not have a portion himself in Canaan; he receives a double portion through Ephraim and Manasseh. Yet Jacob will not leave him without a personal holding, and grants him Shechem as his personal possession.

“One portion” is literally “one Shechem.” The reference to his sword and bow can only refer to the conquest of the city by Simeon and Levi. Though he strenuously condemned their violence, ultimately he as the head of the family was responsible for it, and through it Shechem came into their possession. Now he grants it to Joseph as his personal possession, and it is where Joseph's bones are laid to rest in Josh 24. See Waltke for a good discussion of God's sovereign use of man's sin to accomplish his purposes, Psa 76:10.

Grammatically, I can find no other instance of *xd* used attributively following a PN. In the Shema, *YHWH xd* is a predication (cf. Zech 14:9); other instances are appositional (e.g., Dan 10:3; often in Josh 12 and Ezek 48, enumerating a list. Possible meanings here:

- Maybe this is to be understood as a list with one entry: “Item—Shechem.”
- Perhaps we should understand the expression here appositionally. f“I have given you Shechem by itself, alone” or “in its entirety,” both the city and the purchased field. Cf. Exod 26:6; 36:13; Ezek 37:17 for *xd* indicating a union of previously disjoint parts.

49:1-32, Blessing of the Sons

We considered these six years ago, in our study of Josh 13-17.

1 Gather yourselves together.—Contrast Isaac’s attempt to give his blessing in secret only to Esau. Jacob not only wants each son to hear what he has to say to them, but he wants the others to hear it as well. They are a family. The prestige he gives to one is intended for the care of the others; the rebuke he gives to another is intended for the warning of all.

the last days.—This phrase always has a prophetic sense, describing something either in the historical (Num 24:14; Deut 4:30; 31:29) or distant eschatological (Isa 2:2) time. The future in focus in this blessing reaches from the settlement in Canaan (v.13) to the coming of the Messiah (v.10) and on into the Messianic age (v. 11). He is concerned to point them beyond their temporary residence in Egypt, and to remind them that their ultimate home is elsewhere.

It is worth remarking the relative orders of the sons’ names in the various places where they are named together.

- At birth, they are named chronologically.
- On the road to Hebron, they are grouped by mother, with full wives before concubines, but otherwise chronologically.
- Here, the order is more complex. We will try to understand it as we work our way through.

Son (Mother)	Birth (ch 29-30)	Hebron (ch 35)	Blessing (ch 49)
Reuben (Leah)	1	1	1
Simeon (Leah)	2	2	2
Levi (Leah)	3	3	3
Judah (Leah)	4	4	4
Dan (Bilhah/R.)	5	9	7
Naphthali (Bilhah/R.)	6	10	10
Gad (Zilpah/L.)	7	11	8
Asher (Zilpah/L.)	8	12	9
Issachar (Leah)	9	5	6
Zebulun (Leah)	10	6	5
Joseph (Rachel)	11	7	11
Benjamin (Rachel)	12	8	12

3-4, Reuben

Reuben’s inheritance is described in Josh 13:15-23. It lies to the east of the Jordan, between the Arnon and Heshbon (roughly, the northern half of the Dead Sea).

Jacob’s words to Reuben have two parts: a five-fold analysis of his privileged position as firstborn, and a severe condemnation of his incest with Bilhah, 35:22.

Positive Words

These fall into two groups: what Reuben’s position meant to Jacob (3x “my”), and what it should have meant to Reuben (2x “excellency”).

my firstborn.—It is natural for a father’s first child to hold a place of special affection. Recall how fond Abraham was of Ishmael, or Isaac of Esau. God uses the term “my firstborn” when he wants to emphasize how dear his people are to him (e.g., to Pharaoh in Exod 4:22, “Israel is my son, even my firstborn”). This privileged position ordinarily entitled a son to a double portion of the inheritance. In fact, Israel’s later law (Deut 21:15-17) made it illegal to deprive the firstborn of this double portion in favor of a later son of another wife—but this is exactly what Jacob does here in giving the birthright to Joseph (1 Chr 5:1,2). It is not illegal at this point, but it would strike the readers as extremely severe (as would the supplanting of Ishmael by Isaac, or of Esau by Jacob—all three emphasizing the priority of God’s election over man’s preference).

my might.—The reason for this special position is that a man’s first child really marks his passage into manhood, becoming the father to a subsequent generation.

the beginning of my strength.—“Beginning” is the word sometimes translated “firstfruits.” Abel knew that the first increase he enjoyed should belong to the Lord (4:4); the idea here may be that as the first indication of Jacob’s strength, Reuben ought to have been offered to the Lord in a special way. Later, when Moses instituted the law that the firstborn of every animal belonged to the Lord because they were spared at Passover (Exod 13:12,13), God claimed the Levites in place of the firstborn humans (Num 3:12,13). Jacob may be intimating here that Reuben was in line not only for the birthright, but also for a priestly role.

The next two titles shift away from what Reuben meant to Jacob and focus on his exalted status. Both suggest that he should have aspired to a position of rule over the other tribes, as their king.

excellency of dignity.—Literally, “excellency of exaltation” or “highness,” a term used of God in Job 13:11; 31:23, and appropriate to royalty (“your highness”).

excellency of power.—Another term appropriate to deity (Exod 15:2), and also appropriate of a powerful king (Isa 19:4; Dan 8:23).

Thus Reuben might have expected three things: the birthright (as firstborn), the priesthood (as Jacob’s firstfruits), and the throne (because of his dignity and power).

Negative Words

Unstable as water.—To serve well in the positions to which Reuben was entitled, he would need certain traits of character. Unfortunately, he has proven himself ill-suited to such a role. The word Jacob uses to describe Reuben appears only here in the OT, but a related verb is used “twice in the prophets (Jer 23:32; Zeph 3:4) for false prophets inventing their messages, and once in Judges for unscrupulous men bribed to murder (Judg 9:4).” Cognate evidence suggests the word means “frothing, gushing, boiling.” always changing, without any firm foundation. Gill: the expression is “to be understood ... of his fall from his excellency and dignity, like the fall of water from an high place; and of his being vile, mean, and contemptible, useless and unprofitable, like water spilled on the ground.”

thou shalt not excel.—The translators have well captured Jacob’s pun with the two expressions in the earlier verse, “excellency.” By birth he should have excelled; but in fact he will not, because of his instability.

thou wentest up.—As evidence of his instability, Jacob cites the incident recorded in 35:22, when after the death of Rachel, Reuben committed incest with Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid and Jacob’s concubine, to prevent her from succeeding her mistress as Jacob’s favorite. This rash action does not show a character appropriate to the birthright, the priesthood, and the throne. Compare also his suggestion on the brothers’ first return from Egypt (42:37), “slay my two sons if I bring [Benjamin] not to thee.”

he went up to my couch.—The shift to the third person is telling, as though Jacob turns from speaking directly to Reuben, and says to the other sons, “Can you believe it? He actually invaded my bed!”

Such a public rebuke seems at first overly harsh, but in light of his privileged position, it must be thus. Compare Paul’s admonition to the church when elders sin: “them that sin, rebuke before all,” 1 Tim 5:20, and recall that when Paul admonished Peter for his partisan rejection of gentile

believers, he did so “before them all,” Gal 2:14. The more public your ministry and responsibility, the more important it is for those who rely on you to be warned of your failings.

As the Jewish sages note, he lost all three benefits. The birthright went to Joseph, the priesthood to Levi, and the throne to Judah. Matthew Henry notes, “No judge, prophet, nor prince, is found of that tribe, nor any person of renown except Dathan and Abiram, who were noted for their impious rebellion against Moses. That tribe, as not aiming to excel, meanly chose a settlement on the other side Jordan.”

Summary: Reuben warns us of the danger of trusting in privilege and position. Such position provides no immunity to judgment for sin. Reuben presumed on his privilege, and lost it.

5-7, Simeon and Levi

5 brethren.—Jacob joins these two in a single prophecy. Of course they were brothers, along with Reuben, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun, but each of these others receives his own blessing. Judah’s point is that they have something far deeper in common, manifested by their raid on Shechem (34:25).

instruments of cruelty.—Better, “violence.” Violence is the common trait that sets these two brothers apart—not just in self-defense, but as a deliberate plan, deceitfully perpetrated. [See various possible meanings for *m:kerot*. HALOT’s suggestion would line up with the following couplet, and also support the parallelism here, as would AV, though without etymological foundation.] In today’s terrorist climate, it is interesting to recognize that “violence” here is *xamas*, the acronym of the “Islamic Resistance Movement” in Palestine. Jacob is as disgusted by their actions as peace-loving people around the world are by suicide bombers today.

6 my soul.—Jacob disowns their action. He does not want to be associated with it. His instinct anticipates many later cautions about those with whom we associate:

- Psalm 1:1 Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.
- Psalm 26:4 I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers.
- Proverbs 1:15 My son, walk not thou in the way with them; refrain thy foot from their path:
- Proverbs 4:14 Enter not into the path of the wicked, and go not in the way of evil *men*.

His rejection of association with them suggests that they may have tried to entice others of their brothers into the action. “Assembly” and “secret [counsel]” also emphasize the group nature of their action.

their anger ... their selfwill.—Note that it is not the violence of their action that repulses Jacob so much as their motivation. His descendants, under divine command, will one day put the entire land to the sword, and their moments of mercy (e.g., the Gibeonites) will be viewed as lapses. His condemnation focuses on the motive for their actions. “Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart,” 1 Sam 16:7.

- They claimed that they were enforcing justice: 34:31 “should he deal with our sister as with an harlot?”
- He discerns that the real motive was selfwill, a desire to satisfy their own lusts and hatred toward the Canaanites.

Another's sin does not justify our sin. Any of us who examines his own heart will know how difficult it is to keep our motives straight, and how easily selfish and carnal impulses masquerade as righteous duties. Psa 19:12, "Who can understand his errors?"

v.7 continues with the condemnation of their motives. The word "wrath" is critical here. This is one of those attributes that it appropriate for God, but never for men.

- It is frequently described as a divine attribute, e.g., Isa 9:19, and once associated with the king as a legitimate mark of his power, Prov 14:35.
- But elsewhere it is uniformly associated with the wicked: Prov 21:24; Psa 7:6; Amos 1:11.

It is an attitude that arrogates to itself the divine right of bringing judgment on others, apart from a legitimate delegation of that responsibility. In the case of Simeon and Levi, the proper channel for that delegation should have been through the father of the clan, Jacob. He should have decided how to respond to the affront to his family. They went around the legitimate chain of command and gave vent to their own violent lust, and for this they are condemned.

digged down a wall.—The margin is preferable, "houghed cattle." But in either case, the imagery communicates the uncontrollable nature of their wrath, which poured out itself in wanton destruction, either of buildings or of the cattle that they could not take with them.

divide ... scatter.—The judgment fits the crime. Throughout the prophecy, Jacob has emphasized the collusion between them that led to this outcome:

- Treating them together as a single unit
- V.5, brethren (and if HALOT is correct, *m:kerot* "plans")
- V.6, secret counsel, assembly

They have demonstrated that they cannot be trusted together, so Jacob decrees that they should be scattered among the rest of Israel, diluting them and making it more difficult for them to plot such actions in the future.

In the history of Israel, neither tribe had a clear-cut territory of its own. The inheritances of the other tribes in cis-Jordan were designated in two ways in Josh 13-21:

- a boundary list that delimited the territory
- a list of the prominent towns or cities within its domain.

Simeon and Levi have only city lists, no boundary lists. They have no integrated territory that they can call their own. The nature of their scattering differs, and shows two different kinds of outcome that can result from sin.

- **Simeon's** cities are all within the boundaries of Judah. It is in effect placed under the supervision of a more responsible sibling, who will watch over it and keep it from going astray. In Simeon's case, the tribe as a whole never really recovers from the failure of Jacob's son, and is relegated to a position of permanent inferiority.
- **Levi's** cities are distributed throughout all of the other tribes. Here, the effect is just the opposite. Levi is not placed under the supervision of others, but rather, as the tribe to whom the priesthood is committed, is a source of instruction and guidance to the other tribes. This tribe does learn from its sin, and turns that learning to the benefit of others.

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Levi's dynamic is the same as in the case of David. After his grievous sin with Bathsheba, he repented (Psa 51), and in his repentance promised that if he were forgiven, he would teach transgressors God's ways (v.13). God did in fact forgive him, and in his subsequent psalm of rejoicing (32), he does in fact give the instruction he had promised (vv. 8-11).

If Reuben's sin was to trust in his position and privilege, that of Simeon and Levi was to think that fleshly self-righteousness could substitute for godliness. It was right that Shechem should be judged for sin, but they were wrong in arrogating to themselves the privilege and responsibility that rested on Jacob, and for acting in self-will.

Two *applications* from the distribution of Simeon and Levi.

1. Sin is tragic, but not necessarily final. When we are overtaken in a fault, will our recovery resemble that of Simeon, or that of Levi? Will we surrender the struggle and descend into meaninglessness like Simeon, or learn from the sin and God's chastisement and become a means of blessing to others?
2. The roots of Israel's priesthood in Levi's sin offers a striking contrast with our Lord's priesthood on our behalf. It is, indeed, required that a priest must be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb 4:15, 5:2). But Levi and our Lord were touched in very different ways: Levi because he was himself a sinner; our Lord because he took our form and bore our sins. The culmination of the contrast between the Levitical priesthood and our Lord's in Heb 7:26-8:1 is that our Lord is sinless.

8, Judah

Judah's inheritance occupied the southern portion of the country, starting at a line that ran through Jerusalem. (David chose Jerusalem as his capital because of its border position between Judah and the northern tribes, and because as his conquest it belonged to him.)

The messages that Jacob gave to the first three sons must have left Judah trembling. In the flesh, he is no better than they: consider

- his ungodly marriage to the daughter of Shua (38:2);
- his refusal to give his son Shelah to Tamar (38:11)
- his prostitution with Tamar (38:16),
- his suggestion to sell Joseph into slavery (37:26)

From Jacob's previous rebukes to his brothers, he will be expecting no better. He will be bowed down with the knowledge of his own sin, weeping and expecting the worst, when suddenly the clouds break and Jacob pours out on him the good news of his election to the greatest privilege.

Application: in this reconstruction we can see how God deals with us in our sin. As we behold his judgments on the wicked, we are led to see our own sin and unworthiness, and to repent of it and despair of any hope. Then the Lord turns to us, and in unexpected love and grace declares his favor to us. This is how we come to the Lord—not with self-pity claiming his love, but in repentance, worshipping him for his undeserved and inexplicable grace.

Jacob's blessing on Judah has four parts. The first and third emphasize his *position* as ruler (thus inheriting the position of prince that Reuben forfeited), while the second and fourth emphasize the *nature* of his rule (security and prosperity).

8, Position: External Enemies

8 Judah, ... thy brethren shall praise.—The name “Judah” means “praised.” Leah gave her son this name as she said, “Now will I praise the Lord” (29:25), thus the one who should be praised is the Lord. Here Jacob anticipates that Judah himself will be praised by his brothers.

The verb *ydh* “to praise” is almost exclusively applied to God in the OT. It is only applied to people in three other places in the OT, and in all of these it retains its divine overtones:

- Psa 45:18, in the royal wedding psalm, where the king has already been described in divine terms (v. 6; cf. Psa 2 and Psa 110)
- Psa 49:18, of the inappropriate praise given to the rich during their lives;
- Job 40:14, where God asserts that Job deserves praise only if he can do the things God does.

So here, by using this verb, Jacob anticipates that Judah will be the Lord’s representative as ruler of his brothers. Right away he sets the messianic expectation that has been recognized in this passage even among Jewish scholars.

thy hand.—This expression reflects his military conquest of the adversaries of the nation (cf. 1 Sam 18:17), and is reflected in the victories of David, and later in Messiah’s victory (Rev 19).

thy father's children [sons].—When Isaac blessed Jacob, he made him lord over “thy mother’s sons.” Jacob alters this wording here because all of his sons, not just those born to Leah, will acknowledge Judah’s supremacy.

shall bow down.—This is the word for prostration that figured so large in the development of Joseph’s story. While the family all bowed down before Joseph in the context of the famine, ultimately Judah is the one who will rule the nation, and all, including Joseph, will bow before him.

Putting these verses together, the motive that leads Judah’s brethren to acknowledge him as king is that he can defend them from their enemies. This insight can help us understand the NT emphasis on repentance as the first step in coming to the Messiah. We do not submit to the Lord Jesus in the first instance because of his love or tenderness toward us, but because we recognize that we have been led astray by a great enemy, that the Lord has slain our adversary, and that we must turn from our former allegiance to serve and worship him.

9, Nature: Security

In this first description of the nature of Judah’s rule, Jacob draws on the imagery of a lion. In biblical times, large cats were a prominent feature of the fauna of Israel, and they are mentioned nearly 100 times in the OT. Note the successive stages in Judah’s history:

Judah is a lion's whelp.—This term refers to a young lion who has not yet learned to catch prey; cf. Ezek 19:3, which makes exactly this distinction between the *gur* and the *kpir*. This covers Judah’s period up to the time of David, when the tribe was not notable for military prowess.

from the prey ... thou art gone up.—Here we reach the time of David, when Judah’s military prowess was finally demonstrated.

he stooped down, he couched.—The picture here is of the lion after it has slain its prey and climbed back to its rocky fastness, crouching down in its lair, secure in the knowledge that no one dares to interfere with it. This best fits the period of Solomon’s reign.

10, Position: External Friends

Because of his demonstrated strength and victory over the nation’s adversaries, Judah will wield the **scepter**, the sign of royal authority.

Some rulers are absolute, but Jacob goes on to indicate that Judah will always be accompanied by a **lawgiver**, which the Targum translates as “scribe.” Israel’s king is not a law unto himself, but is subject to the law given by Moses and interpreted by the Levites, and Israel’s most godly kings worked closely with the temple priesthood.

- Deuteronomy 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of *that which is* before the priests the Levites:
- 2 Chron 19:8-10, Levites as judges and teachers of the law throughout all Israel, under the king.
- 2 Kings 12:2, Jehoiada’s role in guiding king Jehoash, whom he preserved from Athaliah
- 2 Kings 21, Hilkiyah delivers the book of the law to Josiah and instigates a reformation

This dominant position of Judah will continue **until Shiloh come**. We must consider both “until” and “Shiloh.”

Who is **Shiloh**? This is a very complex exegetical question that we will not go into here in detail.

- All interpretations lead to a Messianic interpretation. The Jewish Targum is the pre-Christian translation of the OT into Aramaic. It renders this verse, “the one who holds power shall not depart from his household, nor the scribe from his descendants forever, until the Messiah comes to whom the kingdom belongs, and the people shall obey him.”
- The KJV treats it as a proper name, which would be derived from the root *\$lh* (cf. *\$alwah*) meaning “rest.” This name would then mean “rest-giver,” “peaceful one.”
- This word is in the same semantic family as *\$alom* (cf. Psa 122:7). It is thus similar to “Solomon,” derived from *\$alom*, a name that reflected David’s desire for peace after his militant reign.
- Jacob’s prophecy would then point toward a ruler of peace after Judah’s history of military success (reflected in the “lion” prophecy of vv.8-9). It anticipates Solomon, but reaches farther, just as Solomon himself does, to anticipate the one Isaiah would call the “prince of peace,” Isa 9:6.

What does it mean to say that Judah will rule **until** Shiloh comes? In Hebrew, “until” can mark a milestone rather than the end of the line. Compare

- God’s promise to be with Jacob “until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of,” 28:15—this does not mean that God will no longer be with Jacob after he has brought him back to Canaan.

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- God’s promise that the Messiah will sit on his right hand “until I make thine enemies the footstool of thy feet,” Psa 110:1; Messiah will not then be degraded.

the gathering of the people is better “the obedience of the peoples.”

- The noun means “obedience,” not just “gathering,” as the only other OT use of the noun (Prov 30:17) shows.
- “People” is plural, referring to the many nations that will be gathered to Messiah.

This promise of Jacob thus anticipates Psa 2:8, “ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance.”

11-12, Nature: Prosperity

The imagery in these verses anticipates the abundant fruitfulness of the land during the Messianic age.

Foal ... ass’s colt.—Donkeys were the royal mount in biblical times.

- The sons of the judges Jair (Jud 10:4) and Abdon (12:14) rode on them.
- David’s mount was a mule, 1 Kings 1:33, 38, 44.
- An ass is the steed of the promised Messiah, Zech 9:9

Binding ... unto the vine.—The last place you would tether a mount is to a vine, for it would eat the valuable plant and its fruit. So plentiful are vines in the new world that there is no need to protect them from animals.

Washed his garments.—Wine will be so common that it can be used as scrub water (Waltke).

Eyes ... teeth.—The focus here is on the beauty and health of the king.

13, Zebulun

Here for the first time Jacob deviates from the chronological birth order as recorded in chapters 29-30. The change here has two parts.

First, although Zilpah’s sons intervened between Judah and Issachar, he will complete Leah’s sons before going on to those of the handmaid.

Second, he advances Zebulun before Issachar. This appears to reflect the relative status of the two tribes in later history; Zebulun was more prominent than Issachar.

The prophecy about Zebulun is puzzling. At first glance, it suggests a seaside location with the tribe, bordering on Sidon, the Phoenician city north of Tyre. Both geographical suggestions are at variance with the boundaries outlined in Joshua 19:10-16:

- Zebulun is landlocked, not by the sea.
- It is not the northernmost tribe; both Asher (along the Mediterranean) and Naphthali (along the Hula valley) lie to the north of it, and later Dan migrated to the northernmost position.

These observations encourage us to reconsider the meaning of the verse.

Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea.—“Dwell” here is not the usual verb *y\$b*, but *\$kn*. An important key to the distinction between the two is that while God is said to *y\$b* in heaven, on earth he *\$kn*'s (leading to the *mi\$kan*, the tabernacle). The point is a temporary sojourn, not a settled residence. Jacob is not prophesying Zebulun's territory, but the fact that he will frequently visit the seaside.

he shall be for an haven of ships.—Literally, “he shall belong to the shore of ships.” Jacob does not predict that the shore shall belong to him, but that he shall belong to it; it attracts him, and holds his attention.

his border shall be unto Zidon.—“Border” is not the technical term indicating the extremity of his territory, but “flank, side.” The expression may indicate his association with this major Phoenician trading city.

In sum, Zebulun is to be a tribe of merchants, familiar with other nations and dealing in trade. Deut 33:19 prophesies that he shall “suck of the abundance of the seas.” His position along the valley of Jezreel puts him athwart the major trade routes. It is noteworthy that a city in Zebulun, Gath Hopher, was the home of Jonah, selected by God for a foreign mission, and in his flight from God showing his familiarity with the sea and international travel. God chose him for his mission in accordance with the tribe's inclinations and skills.

14-15, Issachar

Issachar's territory was the eastern half of the Valley of Jezreel, the richest farmland in all of Israel. As a result of his comfortable position, Jacob prophesies that he will become weak and subject to others, a condition reflected in postponing his prophecy to a position after that of his younger brother Zebulun.

a strong ass couching down between two burdens.—“Burdens” is better translated “saddlebags.” The image probably refers to the situation of the Hill of Moreh in the center of their territory, situated between Mt. Gilboa on the south and Tabor and the hills of Nazareth on the north.

rest was good, ... the land ... was pleasant.—Issachar became seduced with comfort and prosperity, leading to the unfortunate reversal of fortunes in the next couplet. Gill: “he saw that a quiet industry exercised in a diligent cultivation and manuring his land was preferable to the hurry of a court, or the fatigue of a camp, or the dangers of the seas.”

[he] bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.—Jacob is interpreting Issachar's name. Recall from 30:18 that Leah named the son because “God hath given me my hire.” Jacob predicts that the tribe will continue to be a hirling. “servant unto tribute” is *mas* (*obed*, an expression used repeatedly to describe the subservient position that the Canaanites were supposed to assume toward Israel (Josh 16:10; 1 Kings 9:21). Around 1400 BC, the king of Megiddo wrote to Egypt about his corvee teams in this area. This is a bit too early for Issachar to be here, but it shows the *status quo ante* into which Issachar apparently settled.

Application: Issachar's willingness to exchange freedom for comfort is a warning to us of a natural but dangerous human tendency. God promised them the land; he is content merely to dwell there and cede title to others. Spiritually, God has promised us great possessions: communion directly with him, simplicity of worship, faithfulness to the Scriptures, freedom from human hierarchy. But it is easy to look at large churches with fancy programs and wonder if it

might be OK to give up our spiritual independence for the sake of rest and pleasant surroundings. Issachar's example warns against this.

16-17, Dan

Dan is the eldest of the handmaidens' sons, and the first part of Jacob's blessing to him is motivated by a need to clarify their condition.

16 Dan shall judge.—As with Judah and Issachar, so with Dan Jacob makes a pun on his name. “Dan” means “judge.” Rachel had chosen the name for Bilhah's first son from her sense that God had judged her over her sister. Jacob, leaving behind this competitive attitude, anticipates that Dan will be a judge among his brethren.

his people has been understood of Dan's tribe alone, or of the entire nation. The expression is usually used of a deity or head of state concerning those over whom he rules, and would suggest a perspective down the hierarchy rather than sideways. Cf. Ruth 3:11; 4:4 where Boaz uses it to refer just to the city of Bethlehem. The point is that Dan will stand on his own two feet, and not require supervision by others.

As one of the tribes of Israel.—Jacob does not have a specific tribe in mind (some commentators think Judah), but rather, is indicating that this first of the handmaid sons stands on equal footing with the others in his ability to manage his affairs. Sarah had insisted, “the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son” (21:10), but would eventually come under his rule. This is not to be the case with Dan. Though born to a slave, he will regulate his affairs on a par with any of the full sons.

17 Dan shall be a serpent.—This is actually expressed as a wish: “May Dan be a serpent...” To judge his people, Dan must be capable of self-defense. Though he is small, this does not mean he need be defenseless, and Jacob aspires that he shall have the disproportionate effect that a serpent does on the much larger horse and rider. This prayer was answered in Samson and the ability of the Danites to overthrow the people of Laish in their later history.

18, Prayer Break

Jacob has finished blessing seven of his twelve sons. Five await to hear from him, but his strength is failing fast. He pauses for a moment to direct his attention to the Lord, who has been his helper, and to express his confidence in the Lord's salvation.

While parenthetical, this thought is not unrelated to what he has been saying. He has promised that Judah would be a conquering lion and Dan a small but deadly serpent; that Zebulun and Issachar would prosper. Now he would remind them of the ultimate source of all prosperity and deliverance from evil. From his own testimony, they should learn that deliverance comes from the Lord.

And what is that deliverance? The Jewish sages believed that it referred to Messiah: “said our father Jacob, not for the salvation of Gideon, the son of Joash, which is a temporal salvation, do I wait; nor for the salvation of Samson the son of Manoah, which is a transitory salvation; but for the salvation of Messiah the son of David, (which is an everlasting one,) who shall bring the children of Israel to himself, and his salvation my soul desireth.”

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Note that Jacob's faith in the Lord exists alongside his promise, and even desire, that Judah and Dan would show military strength and that Zebulun and Issachar would prosper materially. God uses material circumstances to accomplish his objectives. Paul captures this difficult balance when he exhorts us to use this world without abusing it (1 Cor 7:31).

- It is an error to pride oneself in material security and strength, or to act in fleshly ways forbidden by Scripture, and not trust the Lord.
- It is equally wrong to ignore our responsibility to provide for our families.

May God give us grace each day to use the world without abusing it in our service to him.

19, Gad

Here again Jacob departs from the chronological order; after Dan, the order of the handmaids' sons was Naphthali, Gad, and finally Asher, with the two sons of Rachel's handmaid Bilhah coming before the sons of Leah's handmaid Zilpah. The motive for Jacob's order is not clear.

- It does give a chiastic order to the handmaids, but the motive for this is not clear.
- It corresponds to their geographical order from south to north (before Dan's migration to Laish).
- Only one tribe is dislocated from the chronological order, and that is Naphthali

The entire verse is a pun on Gad's name, and a change to the meaning that Leah intended.

- In 30:11, Leah named her first son by a handmaid "Gad," which means "luck, good fortune." The names of her previous sons all gave glory to the Lord, but this name reflects her reduced spiritual sensitivity now that she has descended to her sister's stratagem of using a surrogate wife. She cannot really thank God for a son born of fleshly wisdom, and so she says, "Good fortune has arrived."
- "Gad" has only one "d," but it reminds Jacob of another Hebrew word, "troop," which is *gadud* (with two "d"'s). He reinterprets Gad's name in this light. The verbs "overcome" are related to the military sense of the word, so almost every word is a pun on Gad's name. "Gad, a troop shall troop against him, but he shall troop against them." *Gad gedud yegudennu, wehu) yagud (aqeb.*

The meaning is that Gad will be exposed to military attack, but will fight back and ultimately triumph. With an inheritance on the east of Jordan, Gad was constantly exposed to desert marauders. During the time of Jeremiah, his territory was controlled by the king of Ammon (Jer 49:1). Yet the people were renowned, with Reuben and Manasseh, for their ferocity in warfare (1 Chr 5:18). Warriors of Gad were among those who supported David in Ziklag during Saul's reign (1 Chr 12:8).

20, Asher

Asher's territory is along the seacoast north of Carmel, a fertile area whose produce is reflected in Jacob's promise of material prosperity. Leah named him after the happiness she felt when he was born, and Jacob now confirms that his own lot will be a happy and prosperous one.

21, *Naphthali*

Naphthali’s name (“my wrestling”) recalls his birth in a time of strife between Leah and Rachel. Jacob’s blessing sets him free from this burden. Instead of thinking of himself as characterized by strife, he is to be free, and a messenger of joy to others.

a hind let loose.—The female deer is a frequent image of speed, grace, and freedom in the OT. Naphthali should enjoy the freedom he has as a member of the covenant people.

he giveth goodly words.—The masculine participle leaves the image of the doe and takes us back to Naphthali himself. His brethren will look to him as a source of encouragement.

We have little historical material to back up either of these promises, but both could be worked out in the small details of daily life without leaving much of a trace in the history.

22, *Joseph*

The striking thing about the blessing on Jacob is the extended series of divine names that Jacob cites in vv. 24-25 as the source of Joseph’s happiness and success. These names lie at the center of the blessing, which is then extended on each side. Before we have a *description* of Joseph’s felicity, in two ways: his fruitfulness (22) and his victory over adversity (23-24a). After, we have an explicit *declaration* that he will be blessed (using the word 6x), reflecting the same two themes of fruitfulness and triumph.

	Description	Declaration
Fruitfulness	22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:	Bless thee ... blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:
Victory in Strife	23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong	25 help thee ... 26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.
Source: the Lord	the mighty God of Jacob; the shepherd from the stone of Israel 25 the God of thy father, the Almighty,	

22-24, **Description**

Fruitful bough.—This is the first instance in scripture of a common metaphor, describing a believer as a plant flourishing by a source of water. Other instances:

- Psa 1:3 (where the water is tacitly compared with the Word of God)
- Psa 80:8-11 (v.15 uses *ben* = “branch,” just as does this passage)
- Isa 44:3-4, where the water is explicitly described as God’s Spirit
- Isa 5, Israel as the vine

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- John 15:5
- Cf. Rom 11:17-21, which describes the Gentiles and Israel as wild and cultivated olive trees, respectively

These comparisons highlight three aspects of this description of Joseph:

- His purpose: bearing fruit (“fruitful bough”). A vine does not exist for itself, but to produce fruit for its Lord. This aspect is critical in the imagery of Isa 5. If the vine does not produce, it is destroyed and the ground is used for something else.
- His dependence on water (“by a well”). In Psa 1, the water is the word of God; in Isa 44:3-4, it is God’s Spirit. In John 15, the connection is even more intimate; our Lord has direct access to the sources of life, and we receive them only as grafted into him. We cannot flourish by ourselves. By describing us as plants, God is emphasizing that we depend on him and must draw nourishment from him.
- His spread (“whose branches run over the wall”). Cf. Psa 80:11. True life will reproduce itself.

23 the archers ...—Jacob now turns attention to the adversity that has faced Joseph. Arrows are often used in Scripture as an image of slander (Jer 9:3,8; Prov 25:18; 26:18-19). E.g., Jeremiah 9:3,8 “And they bend their tongues *like* their bow *for* lies”; “Their tongue *is as* an arrow shot out; it speaketh deceit.” So the archers here represent Joseph’s brothers, the Ishmaelites, Potiphar’s wife, the royal cupbearer, etc. Their actions take place at three levels:

- The actions themselves (they “shot at him”)
- The effect on Joseph (they “sorely grieved him”); it is never easy to receive adversity. Joseph suffered greatly.
- Their motive (they “hated him”).

Yet Joseph does not succumb. We read of a strong bow and agile hands returning an ample hail of fire against the enemies.

- At first glance this appears to be at variance with his actual conduct. He suffered silently, and did not return slander and accusation against his adversaries.
- Yet he did commit himself to God, and in this defense he did not weaken. Note the means by which “the arms of his hands were made strong”—“by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.” Jacob invites us to see God standing behind him, lending strength to his arms as he draws the bow.
- The same apparent tension appears in the life of David, only in reverse. In Joseph’s case, his actions suggest a meek and yielding spirit, while Jacob’s blessing reveals that he has been waging vigorous spiritual combat. In David’s case, he is a formidable warrior in action, while the Psalms show how completely he depended in the Lord for his deliverance.

By Joseph’s example we should learn how we ought to perform spiritual warfare—not by attacking our enemies directly, but by turning again and again, tirelessly, to the Lord, seeking his intervention. This is in fact the focus of the next section of the text, where Jacob turns to the God who enabled Joseph to survive.

Note that both images (the vine and the warrior) thus emphasize dependence on God. Just as the vine prospers because of the water that God gives it, so the warrior conquers, not by his own strength, but by turning to God.

24-25, Names of God

Jacob traces both Joseph's fruitfulness and his survival to the Lord, whom he characterizes under multiple names.

the mighty God of Jacob.—Literally, “the mighty one of Jacob.” This is the first of five instance of this title in the OT (and the similar “mighty one of Israel” is a sixth). Review them:

- Psa 132:2, 5, in parallel with YHWH, as the one for whom David zealously desired to return the ark to Jerusalem. The psalm emphasizes how the ark was in exile, and asks that God settle down on Mount Zion. So the focus may be on “Jacob” and the recollection of his pilgrimage and God's faithfulness in eventually bringing him back to Canaan.
- Isa 1:24 (with Israel rather than Jacob), in parallel with)DWN and YHWH CB)WT. The context is God's determination to avenge himself on his enemies and purge away Israel's dross. The parallel with “Lord of Hosts” suggests that the emphasis here is on “mighty one.”
- Isa 49:26; 60:16, God is again militant, but this time against Israel's adversaries. The name is in parallel with “saviour” and “redeemer.”

These later uses of the name thus draw on two sets of allusions: Jacob's weakness as a wanderer, and the Lord's great strength to defeat his adversaries and protect his people. But these are later extrapolations from Jacob's use of the name, and do not really help us to understand what he meant by it.

The noun “mighty one” *abir* is closely related to the adjective *abbir*, which appears 17 times in the OT. The word literally means “bull” (cf. Psa 22:13; 50:13), and is used metaphorically to indicate the virility and strength of prominent people. The connection with bulls is intriguing, because this animal is central to the religion of Egypt. The most prominent deity was Osiris, whose incarnation was believed to be the Apis bull, a calf borne to a cow that could never have another calf. One Apis bull was alive at a time, and was revered and after death embalmed. Recall that when the Israelites wanted to fashion an idol on their departure from Egypt, the form they chose was a golden calf.

During his seventeen years in Egypt, Jacob has no doubt observed the Egyptian worship and seen the prominence of the bull. In blessing Joseph, the Vizier of Egypt, he reminds him that the true mighty one is not the Apis bull, but the mighty God who has defended him throughout his life.

the shepherd.—From his current situation in Egypt, Jacob looks back to his earlier life as a shepherd. He recognizes in his patient, diligent care of the sheep a pattern for how God has cared for him. We saw in our discussion of Nimrod (10:10-12) that the shepherd is a ubiquitous theme in the OT for a ruler who protects his people from their enemies. But this is the first time that the idiom has been applied directly to God, and the metaphor does not appear again until David (Psa 23) and the Psalm tradition (80:1).

Sheep are dumb animals, and a shepherd must be very patient in dealing with them. It is a considerable mark of humility that Jacob, once so arrogant and grasping, now confesses himself to be a helpless sheep needing the Lord's care.

the stone of Israel.—This is a very interesting title. God is often referred to as a “rock” *tsur*, the crag of a mountain: Deut 32:4,18, as a solid foundation. Most commentators feel that “stone” here means the same as “rock” elsewhere. But “stone” *eben* refers to a field stone, or a cut stone that is built into a wall, or a sling stone. It is moveable, and can be manipulated, hardly a meaningful image for Jacob to apply to the Lord.

Later texts describe Messiah under the figure of a stone as the element of a building, developed and integrated by Peter in 1 Pet 2:

- Psa 118:118:22, the stone which the builders refused
- Isa 28:16, the Lord lays in Zion a foundation stone
- Zech 7:9, the foundation of the second temple.

Some would see the reference here as Messianic, but the connection is not clear.

Another solution seems preferable. Stones have figured largely in Jacob's life in the pillars he erects: at Bethel (28:18,22; 35:14) and at Mt. Gilead (31:45). The first of these commemorated the appearance of the ladder from heaven to earth as he was leaving Canaan for Haran. Recall the conditional vow he made when he first set up this stone in 28:22, and God's fulfillment of it (28:20-22):

If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God: 22 And this stone, which I have set *for* a pillar, shall be God's house: and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.

At that point he placed himself under God's care, and God did protect him and shepherd him. Perhaps “stone of Israel” is not a title for God, but a reference to Bethel, the referent for “from thence,” and amplifies the title of “shepherd.” “From thence, that is, the stone of Israel, is the shepherd.” Expanding Jacob's terse poetic language, we should understand the phrase, “the one who has shepherded me ever since I set up the stone in Bethel.”

Then these two titles are like bookends around Jacob's life. Living in Egypt, he acknowledges the Lord alone as the “mighty one,” in spite of his hosts' preoccupation with the Apis bull. This is the same Lord who has cared for him ever since the initial revelation at Bethel.

Of course, it didn't always look that way. Jacob may not have felt particularly well shepherded when Laban cheated him concerning Rachel or his wages, or when he saw Esau approaching on his return, or when Simeon and Levi slaughtered the men of Shechem, or when Rachel died in childbirth, or when the famine came on the land. God's care is not always obvious to us while it is unfolding, for it includes exercises and discipline for us that we sometimes find painful. But if we persevere, at the end we will be able to look back with Jacob and acknowledge that the Lord has been our shepherd all the way along.

This God who has faithfully cared for him during his long life will be the guarantor of Joseph's prosperity (22) and security (23-24).

25 the God of thy father.—Who is the “father” here?

He may mean “my God,” 46:1; 31:42; 32:9. But 32:9 suggests that then he should have said “the god of thy fathers,” plural. And this would be rather lame, after the deep semantics of the previous titles.

Recall how the Lord introduced himself to Jacob in 28:13 in the vision of the ladder: “I am the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac.” There, “thy father” was used in the sense of “ancestor,” the head of the family line, the one with whom God initially established his covenant.

This seems much more fitting here. Jacob is reminding Joseph of the original covenant of Gen 12 that God made with Abraham. God promised to bless Abraham and his seed, and Joseph should look back to that promise as the foundation of his security.

This interpretation is confirmed by the next and final name:

the Almighty.—This is the name Shaddai, by which God introduced himself to Abraham in 17:1 in confirming the covenant. Once again, Jacob draws Joseph’s mind back to the foundation covenant, on which everything else rests.

Thus Jacob describes God by four names. The first two point to his own experience of God, as is fitting in supporting the description of Joseph’s prosperity and security. The last two go back to Abraham, identifying the roots of the blessing that he is about to declare.

25-26, Declaration

The description focused first on Joseph’s fruitfulness, then on his victory over enemies. The two verbs in this section treat these in chiasmic order.

Help.—This verb “generally indicates military assistance” (TWOT). God will enable Joseph to overcome his enemies.

Bless.—To bless someone is to speak well of them. God’s speech is creative (Gen 1), and when he speaks well of us, the effect is assured. These blessings focus on fruitfulness, in two spheres:

- “heaven ... deep”.—These are the two sources of water to yield abundant crops: rain and dew from heaven, and fountains and springs coming up from beneath. This was the focus of Isaac’s first blessing to Jacob, when he thought he was Esau (27:28).
- “breasts ... womb”.—Here the promise is of many descendants. This was the focus of Isaac’s second blessing to Jacob (28:3).

26 The blessings of thy father.—Is this “the blessings that thy father gives” (subjective genitive) or “the blessings that thy father was given” (objective)? Probably the latter. Abraham and Isaac were promised numerous seed, but Jacob was the first to realize this blessing. He brought into Egypt some 70 souls descended from himself. He is here bearing witness to God’s faithfulness in blessing: “You can believe what I say, for I have experienced these blessings firsthand.”

Unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.—“Utmost bound” is better translated “desirable things.” Compare Moses’ adaptation of the phrase in Deut 33:15. Jacob here declares that this divine faithfulness will extend beyond the seed to the land as well. God will give him the possession of the hills and their wealth—likely referring to mineral resources (cf. Deut 8:9, “a land whose stones *are* iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass”). Turquoise and copper

were mined in the Sinai from 3000 BC on, and iron was abundant in the Arabah and near Carmel and Hermon.

In this promise Jacob goes beyond his own experience, for he possessed no more of the land than did Abraham and Isaac. He cites his experience to encourage his son in faith, and then says, “Let us go on to trust him together for the part of the promise that concerns the land.”

on the head of Joseph.—That is, as a crown, marking him out as distinct, for the reason given in the next clause:

separate from his brethren.—The references not to his slavery in Egypt, but to his divine designation through the original dreams and his subsequent exaltation in Egypt. “Separate” is *nazir*, from which the position of the nazirite is named. We might say he was a man of “distinction,” emphasizing both being different and exaltation.

Thus Jacob publically acknowledges the favored position in which he has placed Joseph in the private adoption ceremony back in ch. 48.

27, Benjamin

Benjamin is described as a vicious wolf who is engaged in combat from morning to evening. Historically, such was the character of Benjamin:

- Notable warriors from their ranks included the judge Ehud (who delivered Israel from Eglon the fat king of Moab, Judg 3:15), Saul (who delivered Israel from the Ammonites, 1 Sam 11), his son Jonathan (who was zealous against the Philistines, and overcame their garrison with only his armorbearer, 1 Sam 14).
- Their military skill is highlighted in Judg 20:15,16; they were dead shots with the sling (and largely left-handed to boot! Cf 3:15)
- The whole episode of Judg 19-20, concerning the rape of the Levite’s concubine, shows that they were ruthless and unprincipled. In the first battle of the war, 26k of them overcome 400k of the rest of Israel.

28, Summary

In summarizing this extended speech of Jacob, Moses emphasizes three facts that we might otherwise miss, concerning the scope, the nature, and the aptness of Jacob’s statements.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel.—Jacob addressed his sons, not just as individuals, but in their character as heads of the nation. The prophecies of these verses reach beyond their generation to characterize the nation that springs from them.

their father ... blessed them.—Some of the notices are clearly blessings (as to Judah and Joseph), but others might be understood as simply statements of fact, of some moral ambiguity but perhaps warning of violent tendencies (Dan and Benjamin), and still others are clearly rebukes (Reuben, Simeon, Levi). Moses wants us to understand that these are all to be understood as blessings. Even a chastening word is a blessing, if it restores the sinner to righteousness. Thus Proverbs tells us that appropriate chastisement is a mark of parental love (13:24), and transfers this insight to the Lord (3:12; cf. Heb. 12:6). Let us not spurn the Lord’s

chastisement, but acknowledge it as a mark of his tender care toward us, accomplishing his purpose, which is making us like his son (Rom 8:29; Eph 2:10).

every one according to his blessing.—The Hebrew expression is unusual, but paralleled in 44:15, “a man such as I.” It emphasizes the nature of the men who are the objects of Jacob’s blessing. We might expand, “Jacob blessed them, each man who was, in fact, as his blessing indicated him to be.” That is, Jacob’s blessings were not arbitrary, but suited the personality and character of each of his sons. They reflected a deep understanding of their strengths and weaknesses, their future promise and liabilities.

It is worth emphasizing that these men are adults, and yet they patiently receive the exhortations that Jacob gives them. The work of parents is not done when children have graduated from college. They have an important role in guiding and warning their children in years to come. The parents need to recognize and discharge this role, and children need to be receptive to it.

29-32, Final Charge

The addition of “and said” to “he charged them” functions in the same way as it does in the more common construction “he answered and said,” to mark direct discourse.

Jacob has previously bound Joseph to bury him back in Canaan (47:29-31), and now he repeats the charge to all of the sons.

I am to be gathered unto my people.—This expression, unique to the Pentateuch, expresses the faith of the patriarchs in a life beyond the grave. The narrator has already asserted it of Abraham (25:8), Ishmael (25:17), and Isaac (35:29), and the Lord later predicts the deaths of Aaron (Num 20:24, 26) and Moses (Num 27:13), but Jacob is the only one to assert it of himself, expressing his own expectation that his people are out there somewhere and he must now join them.

The cave.—The burying place is described with great detail and accompanied by much of the legal language from the purchase transaction in ch. 23. Why the formality in this language?

- The sons may need these details in reminding the current occupants of that region of the transaction, and securing access to the site.
- Aged Jacob clings to this contract as the only tangible fulfillment of God’s promise to give the land to his family. It is precious to him, for he treasures that promise—the more so since he was exiled from it for so long. With his dying breath, he recalls that there is at least this scrap of the land that he possesses, and he desires to rest there.

We have previously been told that Sarah and Abraham were buried in the cave of Machpelah. Now we learn that this is also the resting place for Isaac and Rebekah, as well as for Leah, who probably died before the family migrated into Egypt.

49:33-50:1, Jacob dies, upon his bed

This section ends as it began in 48:1,2, with Jacob on his bed. With his last wishes made clear, he expires.

We may wonder about the emotions of all of them at this point, but Joseph, who throughout the book is the most demonstrative, is the only one who is recorded as showing his emotion toward his father. Compare God’s promise in 46:4, that “Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.” The

fulfillment of this promise points ahead to the fulfillment of the other, that “I will ... surely bring thee up again [from Egypt].”

50:1-13, Burial of Jacob

2-3, embalming.—Jacob’s body is prepared as befits a prince, the father of a ranking Egyptian official. The 70 days are probably made up of the 40 days of embalming plus 30 additional days of mourning, comparable with Moses (Deut 34:8) and Aaron (Num 20:29).

- The embalming was a practical matter, enabling his body to be returned to Canaan for burial.
- The mourning was not limited to Jacob’s family. He was held in esteem by the Egyptians as well. So are believers to conduct themselves, that they have a “good report of them which are without,” 1 Tim 3:7.

4, Joseph spake unto the house of Pharaoh.—Why did he not go directly to Pharaoh himself? We cannot know for sure, but recognize that the years of plenty and famine are now long past. (Jacob lived 17 years in Egypt, 47:28, only the first five of which were famine, 45:6, so for twelve years Joseph has not had famine work to do.) The fact that he needed permission to leave shows that he remained a member of Pharaoh’s court and made himself useful, but the fact that he needs to go through others to gain this permission shows that he has not struggled to maintain access to the top for its own sake. He performed the work God gave him, but did not value position for its own sake, and was content to fill a lower role in the palace hierarchy.

5, my grave which I have digged for me.—How could Jacob have “digged his grave,” since it was a pre-existing cave? Two explanations are possible.

- To “dig a grave” is an idiom, which really means, “to prepare a burying place.” The detailed semantics of digging may well have been secondary.
- Burial caves in Israel consist of rooms with smaller niches in the walls into which the ossuaries, or bone-boxes, of the deceased are placed. We know that Jacob buried Leah in the cave of Machpelah (49:31). He probably needed to excavate a niche for her within the existing cave, and no doubt prepared his own niche at her side at the same time.

7-10, the trip.—This trip has several notable characteristics.

- It had a strong Egyptian presence, including prominent members of the court.
- Note that the children and flocks stayed in Egypt, proving that they would return. Contrast the exodus some four hundred years later.
- V.10 suggests that they followed a circuitous route to the east of the Dead Sea. “Beyond Jordan” by the narrator of the Pentateuch is always the east bank of Jordan (see additional note below), and v.12 shows that after seven more days of mourning, his sons carry him into the land for burial. Thus the route that Jacob takes to return to Canaan is the one that Israel will itself follow four hundred years later.

Summary of the Emigration

Recall from “Overview” above that this is the third of three cycles that bring Jacob’s family to Egypt. Each cycle includes preparation, the journey, interaction with Joseph (which includes

bowing down to him, and his weeping), Joseph's bounty on his family, and their return to Canaan.

The emphasis on Jacob's burial in Canaan reinforces this threefold structure. Moses clearly wants us to associate Jacob's return here with the Exodus, related later in Numbers and Deuteronomy. The book of Genesis ends with a strong look forward, anticipating the return of the nation to the land.

Similarly, the entire NT has a strong look forward to the return of the Lord Jesus. As Israel in Egypt was to live in the expectation of returning home, so are we.

50:14-26, Epilog

This section is external to the third cycle, which was completed when the family returned to bury Jacob in Canaan. It corresponds to Gen 37-41, the period when Joseph was sold into slavery by his brothers and imprisoned in Egypt. Two pieces of business are outstanding: forgiveness between the brothers, and Joseph's return to Canaan.

14, The Return to Egypt

Joseph certainly, as a member of the court, must return to Egypt, but we must wonder that the rest of the family did not at this time return to Canaan. The famine is over, and they could have resumed their life there. We can probe this circumstance from two perspectives.

- From the divine perspective, the time was not yet right for them to possess the land, according to God's word to Abraham in 15:13-16. Yet that prophecy also indicates that they should be in bondage, and it is difficult to think that they would voluntarily enter into such bondage.
- Humanly, they are comfortable and secure in Egypt. They have come to look on Joseph, rather than the Lord, as their protector (compare in fact v.19). They have a comfortable situation in Egypt, under Joseph's protection, and see no reason to change. God's revelation offers them both a carrot and a stick to return to Canaan, and they neglect both.
 - The carrot is the promise of the land in 12:1; 15:18-21. They do not value the promise of the land. Their desire to return is not as great as was Jacob's (and as will be Joseph's).
 - The stick is the implication of 15:13-16 that this residence will turn into hard bondage for their descendants. They do not recognize this vividly enough to want to leave, now that the immediate concern of the famine has past.

Their condition is an example of how believers can become ensnared by the world and end up neglecting the clear promises and warnings of God's word. May the Lord protect us from such complacency.

15-18, Reconciliation with his Brothers: Their Approach to Joseph

15 Joseph's brethren ... said, Joseph will peradventure hate us.—Though secure in material things, yet the brothers do not have peace in their consciences. So fearful are they, that they cannot confront Joseph directly, but must address him through a messenger (probably a household servant), v. 16. Why should this be?

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- Their comments in 42:21, and Judah's speech in ch. 44, seem to show genuine contrition for what they had done.
- Joseph has treated them with kindness, and provided bountifully for them. They should have no reason to doubt his good will toward them.

The problem may be linked to their complacency in remaining in Egypt. They are not totally committed to the Lord, but carnal in their appetites, and as a result they do not enjoy the peace in their spirits to which they should be entitled. Their focus for blessing is on Joseph, not on the Lord's promises to Abraham. Their confidence rests on Joseph, not on the Lord. Joseph, though a righteous man, is still only a man, and they impute to him their own carnal attitudes.

This pattern has an important parallel today. Conventional evangelical churches make much of the "security of the believer" and "assurance of salvation." The example of Joseph's brothers shows us that there is a difference between being secure and having assurance. His brothers were secure in the Lord's care, mediated to them through Joseph, but because of their carnality, they did not have assurance. When a believer lacks assurance, the solution is not to urge them to accept it as an item of dogma, but to ferret out the carnality that is preventing them from drawing near to the Lord and finding their security in him. Calvin: "there is no other method which can free us from disquietude, but that of returning into favor with God."

Thy father did command.—In English, it looks as though they are reporting to Joseph a request from their father, for the message begins, "I [Jacob] pray thee," and ends, "we [the brothers] pray thee." It sounds as though they are inventing a command from Jacob for the sake of winning Joseph's favor, and leads us to wonder why Jacob didn't mend things himself, during his lifetime.

In Hebrew, the two expressions "I pray thee" and "we pray thee" are the same, simply the particle of polite request (*na*). I think it is better to understand the entire request as being in the mouth of the brothers. They are saying, "Our father told us that we needed to ask for your forgiveness, and so we are doing this."

Thus understood, we can understand why Jacob didn't mend things himself. He couldn't. The issue is not between Jacob and Joseph, but between the brothers and Joseph. For all their sorrow over their sin, they have never asked Joseph explicitly for his forgiveness. Jacob realized this. From his own experience with Esau he knew how essential such a confrontation was. So he counseled them there to deal with this issue with Joseph. No doubt he would have been delighted had they followed his advice during his life, but they did not. Only now, under the nagging burden of their guilt, they finally carry out his admonition, and seek Joseph's forgiveness.

The dynamic is the same that our Lord commands in Matt 5:23,24, that if we know our brother has something against us, we are to go and be reconciled. This (and not the RC confessional) is the point of James 5:16, "Confess your faults one to another."

Joseph wept.—We have frequently seen Joseph's tears, marking his compassionate nature, and here once more we are reminded of them. He is deeply touched to realize his brothers' penitence.

18 his brethren also went.—Apparently, the messenger brings them news of Joseph's compassionate response. Encouraged, they come before him and once more fall down before him, offering to be his slaves.

19-21, Reconciliation: Joseph's Response

His response is chiasmic in form. On either side, he enjoins them not to fear, with a reason. The centerpiece is v.20, which summarizes his earlier comment in 45:4-8: they *sold* him, but God *sent* him. We should interpret the lateral members in light of the center, so start there.

20, The center

This verse could repay an entire message in itself. The verb is the same in both cases; to plan. Focus on three contrasts that Joseph sets forth.

You thought ... God meant.—The first contrast is in the **subjects**: You planned; God planned. And it is God's plan that comes to pass. This is a common pattern in the Bible.

- Isa 10:5-15 documents it in the case of Assyria as God's rod
- The greatest example is how the hatred of men against our Lord led to our redemption:
Acts 2:23

Statements of the general principle:

- Psalm 76:10 Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.
- Proverbs 16:33 The lot is cast into the lap; but the whole disposing thereof *is* of the LORD.
- Romans 8:28 And we know that **all things** [even those done by our adversaries] work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose.

The bottom line is that God is in control, whatever men may undertake. This is what enables us to love our enemies (Luke 6:7), render blessing for evil (1 Pet 3:9), and overcome evil with good (Rom 12:21).

Evil ... good.—What makes God's agency so important is that his **purposes** toward us are purposes of good, not evil, as the brothers' were.

- Jer 21:11, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."
- In the NT era, we can take great comfort from Rom 8:32. If he didn't spare his own son, how can he possibly withhold any good thing from us?

Me ... much people.—Finally, contrast the **objects** of the action. The brothers' focus was only on Joseph. God's purpose is to deliver "much people," not just the family of Jacob, but many others as well.

If only we could grasp the truth that Joseph summarizes here, how much more peaceful our lives would be, and what a blessing God could be through us to those around us.

19, First Bracket

The first "fear not" is motivated by saying, "For am I in the place of God?" See notes later on various interpretations that have been proposed for this phrase. In light of the center, it seems best to understand Joseph as saying, "This whole matter is out of my hands. God, not I, is in

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control here. I will not enslave you, for that is not his purpose. I will not take vengeance on you, for that is not his purpose. If you trust in God, you have nothing to fear from me, for I will not usurp his prerogatives.” Thus the first bracket indicates that his appreciation of v.20 forbids him from doing some things that the brothers might otherwise expect from him.

21, *Second Bracket*

The second “fear not” is motivated by a promise of nourishment. Because God has evidently sent him to save much people, his duty in particular is to deliver and sustain them. Just as v.19 tells what he will *not* do because of God’s sovereign control, v.21 tells what he *will* do.

he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.—This concluding statement reveals two things about a true encounter of forgiveness.

1. The offender is repentant, deeply troubled over what they have done. They are not simply apologizing because Jacob told them to say some words, but because they really recognize the heinousness of what they have done.
2. The one offended does not simply dismiss the past wrongs grudgingly, but undertakes the responsibility of comforting the penitent. “Speak kindly” is *dbr (l lb)*, “speak to the heart,” which is mostly used for a man courting a woman:
 - a. how Shechem courted Dinah, 34:3
 - b. how the Levite sought to recover his concubine in Judg 19:3,
 - c. how Boaz spoke to Ruth in 2:13;
 - d. how the Lord, as a husband, speaks to Israel in Hos 2:14.

So complete is the forgiveness that the offended one can reach out in great tenderness to relieve the deep pain that the offender has realized.

Parallels with the beginning of the book

Tom Constable has collected several interesting parallels and contrasts between this episode (Joseph’s words in particular) and the opening chapters of Genesis.

Gen 1-4	Gen 50, Joseph
“God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, <i>it was</i> very good” 1:31	“God meant it unto good,” 19
Satan to Adam and Eve: “ye shall be as gods,” 3:5	“Am I in the place of God?” 19
Cain: “Am I my brother’s keeper?” 4:9	“I will nourish you, and your little ones,” 19

22-26, Joseph’s Death

God grants Joseph a long life, though not as long as his fathers. Abraham lived 175 years, Isaac 180, Jacob 147. He did see his grandchildren.

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Like his father, he treasured the promise that the family would one day return to Canaan, and insisted that they take him with him when they did. So his body is prepared for long preservation and eventual transport back to the land of promise.

In spite of his prominence in the book, and his place as the savior of his people, he too must die. Joseph is a figure of the coming redeemer, but only a figure. True deliverance awaits the redeemer who has no sins of his own, and who can take his peoples' place in death and resurrection.

Notes

Messianic Peace

If Shiloh in 49:10 is a messianic title, it is to be compared with the name Solomon, Sar Shalom, and other titles connecting Messiah with peace. Trace the history of these titles.

Isa 9:6 sar shalom

Isa 11 description of the messianic age

Jer 23:6

2 Sam 12:24 David named Solomon

Names of the Sons

The names of the sons, originally given by their mothers, are often interpreted by Jacob in new ways.

Name	Mother's Interpretation	Jacob's Interpretation
Reuben	Leah, 29:32 "surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction"	(none)
Simeon	Leah, 29:33 "the Lord hath heard that I was hated"	(none)
Levi	Leah, 29:34, "now will my husband be joined unto me"	(none)
Judah	Leah, 29:35, "Now will I praise the Lord"	49:8, "thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise "
Zebulun	Leah, 30:20, "God hath endued me with a good dowry; now will my husband dwell with me"	(none)
Issachar	Leah, 30:18, "God hath given me my hire"	49:15, "he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute"
Dan	Rachel for Bilhah, 30:6, "God hath judged me"	49:16, "Dan shall judge his people"
Gad	Leah for Zilpah, 30:11, " Good fortune has arrived"	49:19, "a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last"
Asher	Leah for Zilpah, 30:13, "Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed"	49:20 "his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties"
Naphthali	Rachel for Bilhah, 30:8, "with great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed"	49:21 "a hind let loose"
Joseph	Rachel, 30:24, "the Lord shall add to me another son"	(none)

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Benjamin	Rachel, 35:18, "Ben-oni," "son of my sorrow"	35:18, "son of my right hand" (none in ch. 49)
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Later citations of the tribes

In what books are they attested? Focus on the sons of the handmaidens.

	Dan	Gad	Asher	Naphthali
Gen	X	X	X	X
Exod	X	X	X	X
Lev	X			
Num	X	X	X	X
Deut	X	X	X	X
Josh	X	X	X	X
Judg	X		X	X
1 Sam	X	X		
2 Sam	X	X		
1 Kings	X		X	X
2 Kings	X			X
1 Chron	X	X	X	X
2 Chron	X	X	X	X
Psa				X
Isa				X
Jer	X	X		
Ezek	X	X	X	X
Amos	X			
Rev		X	X	X

Deut 33 and Gen 49

Gen 49	Deut 33
<small>KJV</small> Genesis 49:22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: ²³ The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: ²⁴ But his bow abode in strength, and the	<small>KJV</small> Deuteronomy 33:13 And of Joseph he said,

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arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty <i>God</i> of Jacob; (from thence <i>is</i> the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)	
²⁵ <i>Even</i> by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under,:	Blessed of the LORD <i>be</i> his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, ¹
blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:	⁴ And for the precious fruits <i>brought forth</i> by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,
²⁶ The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills	¹⁵ And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,
	¹⁶ And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and <i>for</i> the good will of him that dwelt in the bush:
they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.	let <i>the blessing</i> come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him <i>that was</i> separated from his brethren.
	¹⁷ His glory <i>is like</i> the firstling of his bullock, and his horns <i>are like</i> the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they <i>are</i> the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they <i>are</i> the thousands of Manasseh.

Where is “beyond Jordan”?

B(br)hyr(dn) occurs 11 times in the Pentateuch, mostly of transjordan. Instances that refer to the west bank include the following, all direct speech by Moses.

- Deut 3:20, where RGM/2 are to help their brethren obtain their inheritance;
- Deut 3:25, where Moses wants to go
- Deut 11:30, location of Ebal and Gerizim

The only use in direct speech by Moses referring to the east bank is Deut 3:8. So the general rule is that as narrator, Moses takes the stance of the nation in the land, while as a person he takes the only stance he knew personally, as an exile on the east bank.

Usage in later books:

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- Joshua uses the term 12x, mostly of the east bank. The only references to the west bank are 5:1; 9:1, 12:7.
- Two uses in Judges, and one in Samuel, are all east bank.

The addition of *yammah* (Josh 12:7; or *mizraxah* (Deut 4:41; Josh 12:1; 13:8) is integral, making the expression literally “the west bank of Jordan” or “the east bank of Jordan,” respectively.

See spreadsheet “BeyondJordan.xls”. General rules:

- *yammah* or *mizrax(ah)* make an explicit designator.
- In Pentateuch, the narrator takes the perspective of Israel in the land, so that “beyond the Jordan” is always the east bank. Moses never enters the land, so for him it is the west bank. Deut 3:8, the only exception, is a reference to the territory of Sihon and Og, which is probably a frozen expressions from the perspective of later Israel.
- Remarkably, in Joshua the perspective reverses! Individual people (either in or heading to the west bank) always use the expression to refer to the east bank, while the narrator uses it of the west bank (except once with *mizraxah*), as though he were outside the land.

50:19 “am I in the place of God?”

Four broad categories of interpretation are possible, depending on

- whether the rhetorical question is understood as an effective *denial* “I am not in the place of God” or an *assertion* “I am in the place of God.” (Assertion is *a priori* less likely, since we should have expected *ha lo*) instead of *ha*.)
- whether *txt* means “in the place of” or “under, subject to.”

Assertion

These are most unlikely, given the absence of *lo*).

in the place of.—Gill 3: Joseph’s willingness to serve as their father in nourishing them.

Under.—Gill 2: Joseph is unwilling to reverse the divine blessing on his brothers, most recently evidence in Jacob’s words to them. Calvin 3 fits here, though he correctly notes that the presence of *h* stands against it.

Denial, under

It is *a priori* unlikely that Joseph would have said this, since it is contrary to his evident piety throughout. I know of no interpretation that takes this option.

Denial, in the place of

This is the sense of the parallel expression at 30:2, where Jacob thus protests to Rachel that he is not responsible for withholding children from her. Interpretations differ on what divine prerogative Joseph is denying.

- The right to hold them as slaves: Saadia Gaon in Gill 1; Calvin 1 (Calvin replies that he permitted such address elsewhere, though I don’t find a clear example)

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- Calvin 2: Joseph refuses to exact punishment, since that is God's place (but in the end he does not seek their punishment at all).
- KD: he will not interfere with God's evident providence toward them. Compare Calvin 4: Joseph refuses to thwart the counsel of God, which manifestly is aimed at delivering them through his suffering.