

## Future Blessings

<sup>1</sup> Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.

<sup>2</sup> “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob,  
listen to Israel your father.

<sup>3</sup> “Reuben, you are my firstborn,  
my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,  
preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

<sup>4</sup> Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence,  
because you went up to your father’s bed;  
then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!

<sup>5</sup> “Simeon and Levi are brothers;  
weapons of violence are their swords.

<sup>6</sup> Let my soul come not into their council;  
O my glory, be not joined to their company.  
For in their anger they killed men,  
and in their willfulness they hamstringed oxen.

<sup>7</sup> Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,  
and their wrath, for it is cruel!

I will divide them in Jacob  
and scatter them in Israel.

<sup>8</sup> “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;  
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;  
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.

<sup>9</sup> Judah is a lion’s cub;  
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He stooped down; he crouched as a lion  
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?

<sup>10</sup> The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,  
until tribute comes to him;  
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

<sup>11</sup> Binding his foal to the vine  
and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,  
he has washed his garments in wine  
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.

<sup>12</sup> His eyes are darker than wine,  
and his teeth whiter than milk.” – Genesis 49:1-12 ESV



Nearing death, Jacob called his 12 sons to him. It was time for him to share his patriarchal blessing on the young men who would carry on the legacy of his name and play vital roles in the fulfillment of God's promises. Jacob understood that his time on earth was over and it was time to pass the baton the next generation of Israelites. It would be through them that God would create a great nation that would eventually return to and fill the land of Canaan.

As Jacob gathered his sons around him, he pronounced a prophetic word concerning each of their futures. This section of Genesis is written in a poetic style but is no less historical or reliable. In it, the words of Jacob are intended to convey future realities that will be based on the sovereign will of God as it is played out through the personalities and character qualities of each son. His 12 sons, each bearing distinctively different temperaments, will be the progenitors of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Jacob, under divine inspiration, conveys to each of them the vital, yet divergent, roles they will play in the creation of the Israelite nation. No two sons is alike and the tribes that will emanate from them will end up reflecting their disparate characters.

Beginning with the oldest to the youngest, Jacob delivers a brief, yet powerful prophetic pronouncement concerning each son. And what they heard must have surprised and confused them. It is not clear whether they knew about the blessing he had given to Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph.

*"By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying,  
'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'"* – Genesis 48:20 ESV

Jacob had already made the unexpected decision to adopt Joseph's two sons, born to him by an Egyptian woman. Jacob had chosen to make his two grandsons heirs of his inheritance, placing them on equal standing with his own sons. He had declared a powerful and irrevocable blessing on both of them.

*"...in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;  
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."* – Genesis 48:16 ESV

And while Jacob had frustrated Joseph by purposefully awarding the blessing of the firstborn to Ephraim, the younger of his two sons, Jacob had also assured that Joseph that Manasseh would not be forgotten.

*“He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.”*  
 – Genesis 48:19 ESV

But now Jacob turned his attention to his own sons, speaking over them a word of blessing and prophecy.

“Each son learned how his branch of the family would benefit from and be a channel of blessing relative to the patriarchal promises. The natural character of each son and the consequences of that character would have their outcome in the future of the Israelites. The choices and consequently the characters of the patriarchs affected their descendants for generations to come, as is usually true.” – Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis*

It is unlikely that Jacob understood the full import of his own words. Much of what he had to say to his sons was future-oriented, stretching from the not-so-distant future all the way to the Millennial Age. Jacob did not possess the power of clairvoyance. He could not see into the future or discern with accuracy and confidence the outcome of his words, but he knew that what he was saying was divinely inspired.

Like any loving father, Jacob longed for each of his sons to be successful and to leave a legacy that would positively impact the world in which they lived. So, beginning with Reuben, his firstborn, Jacob delivered a brief, but timeless prediction concerning each of their fates.

Reuben was in for a not-so-pleasant surprise. Because of his ill-fated decision to sleep with Bilhah, his father’s concubine (Genesis 35:22), he would forfeit his right to the blessing of the firstborn. It must have stung Reuben deeply to hear his father pronounce, “you will be first no longer.

For you went to bed with my wife; you defiled my marriage couch” (Genesis 49:4 NLT). Like his uncle, Esau, Reuben had allowed his physical passions to rule over him and rob him of his rightful place of prominence and power among his brothers. And his decision would have long-lasting effects, determining the fate of his future descendants.

Simeon and Levi were probably also a bit surprised when they heard their father’s pronouncement over them. These two sons had brought shame to the name of Jacob by murdering all the men of Shechem for the rape of their sister, Dinah (Genesis 34). They had chosen to take matters into their own hands and, as a result, had made the Israelites “stink among all the people of this land—among all the Canaanites and Perizzites” (Genesis 34:30 NLT). Now, they were having to pay the consequences for their rash and costly action.

Yet, despite the rather negative nature of Jacob’s words concerning Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, he still declared that they would each enjoy fruitfulness and future blessings from God. Their natural role as leaders over the clan had been forfeited but not their right to enjoy status as heirs of the patriarchal blessing.

At this point, Jacob turns his attention to Judah, and it is to this son that he dedicates the greatest portion of his time and his most positive statements of praise and prophetic revelation. Among all his brothers, Judah was destined to play the most vital role of all. It must have been a rather awkward moment when Jacob declared of Judah in the hearing of all his brothers, “your brothers shall praise you...your father’s sons shall bow down before you” (Genesis 49:8 ESV). For each of the sons, this would have brought back the memories of Joseph’s dreams. And while those dreams had already been fulfilled, now they were hearing that they would have to bow before yet another brother.

And while Jacob’s words would have short-term implications, he was really speaking of events that lie in the distant future. The tribe of Judah would become a leading faction among the nation of Israel, but it would not be until the coming of the Messiah that most of these prophecies would be fulfilled.

Jacob declared that “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet” (Genesis 49:10 ESV), and this would eventually be fulfilled through King David and his royal line. But it would ultimately be fulfilled with the coming of the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Messiah of Israel.

All the imagery used by Jacob points to a future fulfillment that has yet to take place. Even during the days when Moses penned these words, the people of Israel had not yet entered the land of promise, the dynasty of David had not yet come, and the prediction of Judah’s preeminence had not yet taken place. But it would. All those things would come to pass, just as Jacob predicted. Yet, even today, the scepter has passed from the hand of Judah. There is no king in Israel. No son of David sits on the throne in Jerusalem. But the day is coming when even those prophetic words will be fulfilled.

Jacob declared some rather cryptic words concerning the future of Judah that must have left each of the brothers scratching their heads in confusion.

*“He ties his foal to a grapevine,  
the colt of his donkey to a choice vine.  
He washes his clothes in wine,  
his robes in the blood of grapes.”* – Genesis 49:11 NLT

None of this would have made sense to them. This imagery is nonsensical and counterintuitive. No one would tie his foal to a grapevine. To do so would end up damaging the valuable vine. And who in their right mind would wash garments in wine? The result would be far from productive or beneficial.

Yet, Jacob was predicting a future event that would result in the judgment of Israel. Though he did not know it at the time, Jacob was predicting the coming of the seed of Judah who would rule and reign over Israel. Jesus would be the Son of David who would be the foal who was tied to the vine of Israel. God would send His Son to be the relatively innocent looking and

unimpressive Rabbi whose very existence would bring judgment upon the God-blessed, but rebellious vine of Israel.

And the day will come when this very same Son of David will return to earth and wash his garments in the blood (wine) of His enemies – all those who refuse to recognize Him as the Messiah and Savior sent from God, including the people of Israel. The book of Revelation describes the day when the King will return to earth a second time and “clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God” (Revelation 19:13-16 ESV).

And the apostle John goes on to declare that the Messiah “will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords” (Revelation 19:15-16 ESV).

Jacob was speaking of future events both near and distant. And God would see that each and every statement made by the dying patriarch would be fulfilled at just the right time and in perfect keeping with His divine will.



## Count Your Blessings

<sup>13</sup> *“Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea;  
he shall become a haven for ships,  
and his border shall be at Sidon.*

<sup>14</sup> *“Issachar is a strong donkey,  
crouching between the sheepfolds.*

<sup>15</sup> *He saw that a resting place was good,  
and that the land was pleasant,  
so he bowed his shoulder to bear,  
and became a servant at forced labor.*

<sup>16</sup> *“Dan shall judge his people  
as one of the tribes of Israel.*

<sup>17</sup> *Dan shall be a serpent in the way,  
a viper by the path,  
that bites the horse’s heels  
so that his rider falls backward.*

<sup>18</sup> *I wait for your salvation, O Lord.*

<sup>19</sup> *“Raiders shall raid Gad,  
but he shall raid at their heels.*

<sup>20</sup> *“Asher’s food shall be rich,  
and he shall yield royal delicacies.*

<sup>21</sup> *“Naphtali is a doe let loose  
that bears beautiful fawns.*

<sup>22</sup> *“Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
a fruitful bough by a spring;  
his branches run over the wall.*

<sup>23</sup> *The archers bitterly attacked him,  
shot at him, and harassed him severely,*

<sup>24</sup> *yet his bow remained unmoved;  
his arms were made agile*

*by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob  
(from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),*

<sup>25</sup> *by the God of your father who will help you,  
by the Almighty who will bless you  
with blessings of heaven above,  
blessings of the deep that crouches beneath,  
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.*

<sup>26</sup> *The blessings of your father  
are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents,  
up to the bounties of the everlasting hills.  
May they be on the head of Joseph,  
and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.*

<sup>27</sup> *“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,  
in the morning devouring the prey  
and at evening dividing the spoil.”*

<sup>28</sup> *All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. <sup>29</sup> Then he commanded them and said to them, “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup> in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. <sup>31</sup> There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah— <sup>32</sup> the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.” <sup>33</sup> When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people. – Genesis 49:13-33 ESV*



Having blessed Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Jacob now turned his attention to his remaining eight sons. He continued to work his way through the list moving from oldest to youngest and providing each son with a specific and personalized blessing. When compared with the blessing Jacob spoke over Judah, these pronouncements appear not only much shorter in length but less impressive in terms of significance. It is not until Jacob reaches his two last sons, Joseph and Benjamin, that his blessings become, once again, lengthier and

richer in detail.

It is interesting to note that Zebulun is told that his people will be associated with the sea. Yet, the region they eventually inherited in Canaan would leave them land-locked and far from either the Mediterranean or the Sea of Galilee. But the location of this land put them in touch with Phoenician traders and prove to be a lucrative trade route from the coast to the interior of the country. There is some speculation that Jacob’s prophecy extends all the way to the Millennial Kingdom when Zebulun’s borders will extend all the way to the Mediterranean Sea.

The descendants of Issachar would inherit a rich and fertile land just below the Sea of Galilee, leading them to become farmers and shepherders. An agrarian lifestyle would supplant any aspirations to play a political role in the future of the people of Israel. It seems that the

Issacharites would even become willing to enslave themselves to the Canaanites in order to enjoy material prosperity and peace.



The Danites would prove to be a tribe of mighty warriors, but they would fail to remove the Canaanites from the land given to them by God as an inheritance.

*As for the tribe of Dan, the Amorites forced them back into the hill country and would not let them come down into the plains. – Judges 1:34 NLT*

Like a deadly viper, the Danites would bring disaster upon the people of Israel, leading them into idolatry (Judges 18). But from this tribe would come Samson, one of the most renowned and controversial judges in all of Israel.

Next comes Gad. His name in Hebrew means “good fortune,” but it sounds similar to the Hebrew word *gûd*, which means “overcome.” From their location on the eastern borders of Israel, the Gadites would experience constant attacks from their enemies, but they would prove to be fierce raiders who successfully stood their ground.

The descendants of Asher would inherit some of the most fertile land in all of Canaan, located along the Mediterranean coast. From this location they would produce food fit for a king’s table.

It is difficult to understand the exact meaning of Jacob’s prophecy concerning Naphtali. The language of this verse is complicated, and its interpretation remains illusive. Scholars have long debated the meaning of this passage and there remains no consensus as to what Jacob was trying to convey. But history reveals that within the land awarded to the tribe of Naphtali, King Jeroboam would eventually set up a golden idol in the city of Dan (1 Kings 12:29-30).

The lengthiest blessing in this section is reserved for Joseph, the 11th son of Jacob who had once been considered dead but was found to be alive and well in Egypt. Jacob had already adopted Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph, and the descendants of these two boys would inherit a large section of land in the very heart of Canaan.

Jacob referred to Joseph as “him who was set apart from his brothers” (Genesis 49:26 ESV), a phrase that seems to carry a double meaning. Joseph had been literally “set apart” by his brothers when they sold him into slavery. But God had set him apart by preordaining his role as the savior of his people. While Joseph had been “bitterly attacked” and severely harassed, God had blessed him greatly. And Jacob prayed that God would continue to bless his favored son.

*“...may the Almighty bless you  
with the blessings of the heavens above,  
and blessings of the watery depths below,  
and blessings of the breasts and womb.”* – Genesis 49:25 NLT

Jacob was fully aware that God’s hand had been on his son, Joseph. Had not Joseph been sold into slavery; he would never have become the second-highest-ranking ruler in all the land of Egypt. And had that not happened, Jacob’s family would have died out in Canaan, the victims of the devastating famine that God had brought upon the land. It was because of Joseph that the promises of God concerning Israel would be fulfilled and Jacob was eternally grateful.

Finally, from the tribe of Benjamin would come a host of mighty warriors. This smallest of all the tribes would have a lasting impact on the safety and security of the entire nation of Israel. Yet, the book of Judges reveal that this fierce tribe would fail to follow the command of God by eliminating the Canaanites from their allotted land.

*But the people of Benjamin did not drive out the Jebusites who lived in Jerusalem, so the Jebusites have lived with the people of Benjamin in Jerusalem to this day.* – Judges 1:21  
ESV

Jacob left no son out. He knew that each of them would have a vital role to play in the future well-being of his descendants. Some would prove more important and vital to the cause than others. But for the promise of God to be fulfilled, each of Jacob’s 12 sons would have to work together to ensure the legacy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

As the patriarch of the family, Jacob knew that God was not yet done. The Almighty had much more in store for Jacob’s descendants and it would take place in the land of Canaan, in keeping with His promises. That is why Jacob closed out his blessings to his sons by reiterating his wish to have his body taken back to Canaan for burial. While he would never live to see the promised land again, he was convinced that his people would one day return and he was determined to have his bones interred alongside his wife, Rachel.

Even when facing the prospect of death, Jacob was hopeful and faithful. He was fully convinced that God would accomplish all that He had promised, and that the legacy of Abraham would be kept alive through his sons and grandsons. Egypt had been a detour and not a final destination. The people of Israel would one day return to the land of Israel because God was not yet done.

## The Beginning, Not the End

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. <sup>2</sup> And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. <sup>3</sup> Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

<sup>4</sup> And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, <sup>5</sup> 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me." Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.'" <sup>6</sup> And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear." <sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, <sup>8</sup> as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. <sup>9</sup> And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. <sup>10</sup> When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. <sup>11</sup> When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. <sup>12</sup> Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, <sup>13</sup> for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. – Genesis 50:1-13  
ESV



Jacob's last dying wish was for his body to be taken back to Canaan and placed in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron, the land purchased by Abraham as a burial plot for his wife, Sarah (Genesis 23:10-20). That land had remained in the possession of Abraham's descendants and became the official family burial plot, containing the bones of Sarah, Abraham, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and his second wife, Leah. His first wife, Rachel, had

been buried near Bethlehem, not long after Jacob's return from Mesopotamia.

Now, it was time for Jacob's bones to be placed alongside those of his deceased family members. So, Joseph sent news to Pharaoh, informing him of his father's passing and requesting a leave of absence from his official administrative duties so that he might return to Canaan and bury his father. Pharaoh graciously agreed to Joseph's request, but nearly two-and-a-half months would pass before Joseph was ready to make the long journey home.

Joseph ordered his personal physicians to prepare his father's body for burial, using the traditional Egyptian method of embalment, which most likely included mummification. The elaborate and laborious process of embalment took 40 days to complete but would have properly preserved the body of Jacob for its long journey back to Canaan. And Jacob's return trip back to the land of promise would be radically different than the one he had made 17 years earlier. On that occasion, his small entourage had consisted of only 70 family members, and he had come in fear and trembling, an insignificant Hebrew in hopes of saving his family from famine.



But this trip was marked by pomp and circumstance. In death, Jacob was treated like a king and given a royal funeral procession fitting for a Pharaoh. In fact, the people of Egypt showed their deep respect for Jacob by mourning his death for 70 days, one day less than they would have mourned the death of a Pharaoh. And when the time came to make the journey back to Canaan, Joseph and his brothers were accompanied by

a host of Egyptian officials and dignitaries.

*So Joseph went up to bury his father. He was accompanied by all of Pharaoh's officials, all the senior members of Pharaoh's household, and all the senior officers of Egypt. Joseph also took his entire household and his brothers and their households. But they left their little children and flocks and herds in the land of Goshen. A great number of chariots and charioteers accompanied Joseph. – Genesis 50:7-9 NLT*

This strange scene seems to foreshadow a number of significant events in Israel's future, and the original readers of Moses' book would have made at least one of the connections. The audience to whom Moses addressed his historical narrative were the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And, at the time they read this chronology of their own history, they were preparing to enter the land of Canaan, having been delivered by God from their 400-year captivity in Egypt. And they would have seen the similarities between their exodus from Egypt

and that of Jacob's elaborate funeral procession. In the book of Exodus, Moses recorded the day when the people of Israel walked out of Egypt as free men.

*When Pharaoh finally let the people go, God did not lead them along the main road that runs through Philistine territory, even though that was the shortest route to the Promised Land. God said, "If the people are faced with a battle, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." So God led them in a roundabout way through the wilderness toward the Red Sea. Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.*

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear to do this. He said, "God will certainly come to help you. When he does, you must take my bones with you from this place." – Exodus 13:17-19 NLT*

That too had been a funeral procession, but it had also been a celebratory occasion, as the people of Israel walked out a mighty army prepared for battle. Estimates are, that over the four centuries they had been in Egypt, they had multiplied greatly so that when they left, they were probably well over a million in number. Moses indicates that there were "six hundred thousand men on foot, besides women and children" (Exodus 12:13 ESV). And they didn't go alone.

*A rabble of non-Israelites went with them, along with great flocks and herds of livestock. – Exodus 12:38 NLT*

Not only that, but the Israelites left Egypt loaded down with great wealth, provided to them by the Egyptians, but according to the sovereign will of God Almighty.

*The Lord caused the Egyptians to look favorably on the Israelites, and they gave the Israelites whatever they asked for. So they stripped the Egyptians of their wealth! – Exodus 12:36 NLT*

The funeral procession of Jacob foreshadowed the exodus of the people of Israel, an event that would take place more than four centuries later.

But there is a second event foreshadowed by Jacob's funeral that Moses' readers would not have recognized because it had not yet happened. And that will be the future exaltation and reverent treatment that an offspring of Jacob will one day receive. Jesus, as a descendant of Jacob, will also be shown great honor and respect. But it will not be because of His passing, but it will be due to His long-awaited second coming. According to the apostle Paul, even after Jesus ascended into heaven after His death and resurrection, He was afforded great honor and glory.

*Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth*

*and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. – Philipians 2:9-11 ESV*

But the day is coming when Jesus will return and be afforded even greater honor as the King of kings and Lord of lords. Paul discussed this reality in his letter to the believers in Rome.

*For the Scriptures say,*

*“As surely as I live,’ says the Lord,  
‘every knee will bend to me,  
and every tongue will declare allegiance to God.’” – Romans 14:11 NLT*

Jacob was honored in death. But Jesus will be honored in life. As a descendant of Abraham, born through the tribe of Judah (one of the sons of Jacob), Jesus fulfilled God’s promise to produce a king from Jacob’s family tree.

*“Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body.” – Genesis 35:10-11 ESV*

And that King will one day rule over the New Jerusalem, God’s eternal kingdom which will descend from heaven to earth, and all the nations of the earth will honor the one true King in his never-ending kingdom.

*I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory. Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. – Revelation 21:22-27 NLT*

So, there is far more to Jacob’s death and funeral than meets the eye. Like the rest of the story of his life, it is a representation of God’s sovereign will and providential provision for His people. Jacob’s death was not the end, but only the beginning of great things yet to come.

## Unwavering Faith in an Unfailing God

*<sup>14</sup> After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.*

*<sup>15</sup> When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." <sup>16</sup> So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: <sup>17</sup> 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. <sup>18</sup> His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. <sup>21</sup> So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

*<sup>22</sup> So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. <sup>23</sup> And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. <sup>24</sup> And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." <sup>25</sup> Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." <sup>26</sup> So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt. – Genesis 50:14-26 ESV*



Joseph and his brothers returned to Egypt after having buried their father Jacob in Canaan. It must have been difficult to leave behind the land of promise yet again. But for the time being, Egypt had become their home away from home. So, having interred their father's body in the cave of the field at Machpelah, they made the

long journey back to Egypt.

It appears that, along the way, Joseph's brothers became apprehensive about what might happen upon their return. With their father and protector dead, perhaps Joseph would take advantage of the situation and enact his revenge for their former treatment of him. Their fear of Joseph had never really subsided, despite the many ways he had shown them love and honor. It had been Joseph who had personally subsidized their food allotment all throughout the years of the famine. He had helped arrange their resettlement in Goshen. And yet, deep down inside, his brothers still did not trust him.

Upon their return to Egypt, the brothers held a discussion on the matter and reached a consensus.

*“Now Joseph will show his anger and pay us back for all the wrong we did to him,” they said. – Genesis 50:15 NLT*

So, they crafted a message and had it delivered to Joseph.

*“Before your father died, he instructed us to say to you: ‘Please forgive your brothers for the great wrong they did to you—for their sin in treating you so cruelly.’ So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive our sin.” – Genesis 50:16-17 NLT*

His brothers had never really believed that Joseph had forgiven them. And they had always feared that he would one day use his power to repay them for the crime they had committed against him. They wrongly assumed that their father’s death would provide the perfect opportunity for Joseph to seek vengeance.

At the heart of their distrust was disbelief. It wasn’t that they failed to trust Joseph, it was that they lacked trust in the promises and provision of God. Years earlier, when Joseph had revealed his identity to his brothers, he had clearly told them that their actions against him had been part of God’s sovereign plan to preserve their people.

*“I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. This famine that has ravaged the land for two years will last five more years, and there will be neither plowing nor harvesting. God has sent me ahead of you to keep you and your families alive and to preserve many survivors. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.” – Genesis 45:4-8 NLT*

And yet, they couldn’t bring themselves to believe that their God had been orchestrating every facet of their relationship with Joseph. By this time, they must have realized that Joseph’s dreams, which had infuriated them, had come true. They had lived to experience Joseph’s prediction that they would one day bow down to him. And despite all the ways in which God had miraculously preserved them, they couldn’t seem to believe that He would continue to do so. They saw Joseph’s power as a problem, not a God-ordained proof of divine protection.

Joseph was grieved by their message. What more could he do to prove his love for them? He longed to be restored to a right relationship with all his brothers and he harbored no ill will toward any of them. So, as he read their message, he wept bitterly. But, once again, Joseph acted, calling his brothers into his presence. He refused to allow this divisive wedge to remain between him and his brothers.

The brothers arrived at Joseph's palace ready to throw themselves at his mercy. In fact, as soon as they entered, they threw themselves at his feet, declaring, "Look, we are your slaves!" (Genesis 50:18 NLT). Preferring to face a lifetime of slavery rather than death, they begged Joseph for mercy. But what they got was another powerful reminder of the sovereignty of God.

*"Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, that I can punish you? You intended to harm me, but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people. No, don't be afraid. I will continue to take care of you and your children."* – Genesis 50:19-21 NLT

Joseph knew what they had done. Not only that, he knew he would have been fully in his rights to seek revenge against them. He not only had the motive, but he had the power to pull it off. But that is not what Joseph wanted because it was not what God had intended. Their crime against him, while untenable and contemptible, had been part of God's providential plan for protecting and preserving the offspring of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph fully believed in the sovereignty of God, and he wanted his brothers to put aside their fears and replace them with faith in the God of their father.

For 25 chapters, Moses has chronicled the life of Jacob and his family. And now, as his history of Jacob's lineage ends, Moses reminds his readers that Yahweh can and should be trusted at all times – regardless of how dire and desperate the situation may appear. And this was a message they needed to hear. The original readers of Moses' book had been the Israelites whom he had led out of Egypt to the edge of the promised land. Moses died before the people had ever entered the land, so this historical narrative would have been intended to provide them with impetus and encouragement as they prepared to enter the land without him. Even as Moses faced death and knew he would never enter the land of Canaan, he composed a song for his people to sing. And, in that song, he mentioned the days that Jacob had spent in Egypt.

*"For the people of Israel belong to the Lord;  
Jacob is his special possession.  
He found them in a desert land,  
in an empty, howling wasteland.  
He surrounded them and watched over them;  
he guarded them as he would guard his own eyes.  
Like an eagle that rouses her chicks  
and hovers over her young,  
so he spread his wings to take them up  
and carried them safely on his pinions.  
The Lord alone guided them;  
they followed no foreign gods.  
He let them ride over the highlands  
and feast on the crops of the fields.  
He nourished them with honey from the rock  
and olive oil from the stony ground.*

*He fed them yogurt from the herd  
and milk from the flock,  
together with the fat of lambs.  
He gave them choice rams from Bashan, and goats,  
together with the choicest wheat.  
You drank the finest wine,  
made from the juice of grapes.” – Deuteronomy 32:9-14 NLT*

God had cared for the descendants of Jacob for more than 400 years. He had protected them and provided for all their needs. He had multiplied them in number and miraculously transformed the 12 sons of Jacob into a vast army of more than 600,000 men by the time they left Egypt.

The story of Jacob, Joseph, and his brothers is intended to be a reminder of the sovereign power of the Almighty God. His plan is never thwarted. His will is never overcome. What Joseph's brothers had done to him had been meant for ill, but God had intended it for good.

Joseph assuaged the fears and guilt of his brothers, assuring them that he had no intentions of bringing them harm. And he lived alongside them in peace until he reached the age of 110. Joseph lived long enough to become a great-great-grandfather, witnessing three generations worth of descendants through his son, Ephraim. But with death closing in, Joseph took one last opportunity to encourage his brothers to maintain their faith in Yahweh.

*“Soon I will die,” Joseph told his brothers, “but God will surely come to help you and lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he solemnly promised to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” – Genesis 50:24 NLT*

Joseph never stopped believing in the promises of God. He had taken his father's body back to Canaan because he knew that was their true home. Egypt had been nothing but a divinely ordained detour. The day would come when God would restore His people to the land He had promised to them. And Joseph believed his brothers, or their descendants would live to see that day. His faith was so strong that he demanded his brothers swear an oath to take his mummified body with them when they returned to Canaan. He, like his father Jacob, had always harbored an intense desire to go home.

It's interesting to note that the book of Genesis began with a couple who displayed their lack of faith in God by questioning His Word and disobeying His command. Rather than trusting God, they tried to become like him. But the book ends with a man of faith who never stopped believing in the promises of God. In fact, Joseph is mentioned in the great “Hall of Faith” found in the 11th chapter of Hebrews.

*It was by faith that Joseph, when he was about to die, said confidently that the people of Israel would leave Egypt. He even commanded them to take his bones with them when they left. – Hebrews 11:22 NLT*

Joseph died in Egypt, but his heart had always been in Canaan. And one day, his faith in God was proven worthy, because his body was returned to the land of promise, just as he had hoped.

*Thus the Israelites left Egypt like an army ready for battle.*

*Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear to do this. He said, "God will certainly come to help you. When he does, you must take my bones with you from this place."*

*The Israelites left Succoth and camped at Etham on the edge of the wilderness. The Lord went ahead of them. He guided them during the day with a pillar of cloud, and he provided light at night with a pillar of fire. – Exodus 13:18-21 NLT*