

The Patriarchs of Israel

Week 9

Joseph, Part 2*

Chapter 45. Joseph Reconciles with His Brothers. He assured them of God's sovereign control of his life and directed them to bring Jacob to Egypt. He then warmly demonstrated his love for his brothers. Judah so impressed Joseph with the sincerity of his repentance and the tenderness of his affection that Joseph broke down completely. He wept tears of joy uncontrollably (vv. 1-2). He then explained his view of his brothers' treatment of him, having discerned God's providential control of the events of his life. Four times he stated that God, not his brothers, was behind what had happened (vv. 5-9). "This statement is the theological heart of the account of Jacob's line (see 50:19-21)." ¹

Joseph had evidently been planning for his father's family to move down to Egypt if or when his brothers would prove that their attitude had changed (v. 10). Goshen was the most fertile part of Egypt (cf. v. 18). It lay in the delta region northeast of the Egyptian capital, Memphis.

After a three-fold expression of Joseph's goodwill toward his siblings (weeping, explaining, and embracing), the shocked and fearful brothers gained the courage to speak. They now recognized Joseph as the one they had so cruelly abused and who was now able to crush them if he chose to do so.

Outstanding in this section is the way in which Joseph's perception of God's ways made him gracious, forgiving, and accepting rather than bitter and vindictive. He saw the love of his God behind the cruelty of his brothers. He had accepted all that had come to him as the will of God, and therefore he experienced the blessing of God.

Israel's Response. The brothers returned to Jacob with news of Joseph's survival and prosperity. Israel would move to Egypt in response to Joseph's invitation and God's encouragement.

Pharaoh's invitation was so generous because Pharaoh held Joseph in high regard. If Jacob chose to accept this offer, he would be free to return to Canaan whenever he chose. That Jacob's family could not leave Egypt 400 years later was due to the later Pharaoh's new policies concerning the Israelite residents of Egypt.

Joseph's admonition to his brothers not to quarrel on their journey (v. 24) probably meant they should not become involved in arguing and recriminations over the past. Since Joseph had forgiven them, they should forgive one another.

Jacob had suffered as a victim of his sons' deception and malice in the past. Nevertheless when he believed that Joseph was alive and ruling over Egypt, his spirit revived and he returned to trusting God. For this reason Moses called him Israel again in the text (v. 28).

Chapter 46. Israel Moves to Egypt. Jacob and his caravan stopped at Beersheba on the southern border of Canaan to offer sacrifices to Yahweh (v. 1). He must have realized he was leaving the land promised to his family by God. This move was as momentous for Jacob as Abram's journey from Ur (12:1-3), his own flight to Paddan-Aram (28:1-22), or his return to Canaan (31:3-54), all of which God encouraged with visions. He did so again this time (vv. 2-3).

Jacob was probably aware of the prophecy that Abraham's descendants would experience slavery in a foreign land for 400 years (15:13). Consequently he must have found it even more difficult to cross into Egypt (vv. 2-4). God revealed Himself to Jacob here to assure Jacob that this move was in harmony with His will for Jacob and his family. God promised to make Jacob's family a great nation in Egypt.

¹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 563.

Because of the Egyptians' disdain for Hebrew shepherds, Jacob's family was not in danger of suffering absorption into Egyptian life as they had been in danger of being absorbed into Canaanite life. The Israelites' removal to Egypt was also a divine discipline. Jacob's sons failed to stay separate from the Canaanites (cf. chapters 34, 38) so God temporarily removed them from the land He had promised them.

God promised to go with Jacob into Egypt (v. 4), where God would form His nation. He further promised to bring Jacob back into the land. He did this by bringing his descendants back 400 years later and by bringing Jacob's body back for burial in the land (50:1-21). He also promised Jacob would not die until he had seen Joseph, who would be present when Jacob died (49:29-33).

Genesis 46:8-27 contains a list of the individuals in Jacob's family when he moved to Egypt. Moses recorded a total of 70 persons (v. 27; cf. Exod. 1:5). The 66 referred to in verse 26 excluded Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh. Stephen said there were 75 (Acts 7:14), but he must have added Joseph's three grandsons and two great-grandsons (Num. 26:28-37).

Egyptians loathed shepherds because agriculture was the basis of Egyptian society and the Nile River sustained it (v. 34). The Egyptians organized their fields carefully and controlled them relatively easily. The comparative difficulty of controlling sheep, goats, and cows led the Egyptians to think of those who cared for these animals as crude and barbaric. Thus the Israelites lived separate from the Egyptians where they increased and developed a distinct national identity and vocation, just as God had promised.

Chapter 47. God Provides for Israel and the Nations. When Joseph presented his family to Pharaoh, they received the best of Egypt's land. Jacob blessed Pharaoh in return for his goodness. In the years that followed, Joseph bought almost all of Egypt for Pharaoh, saved the Egyptians' lives, and furthered Israel's prosperity and blessing. Through him, all the nations near Egypt also received blessing (cf. 12:3).

Jacob's blessing of Pharaoh (vv. 7, 10) implies that in some sense Jacob was superior to Pharaoh. Pharaoh was a man of immense worldly power and influence. Jacob described his life as a sojourn (v. 9), primarily because he had not come into final possession of the Promised Land. He had also lived in widely separated places during his lifetime: Paddan-Aram, Canaan, and now Egypt. His years were fewer than his fathers: 130 compared with Abraham's 175 and Isaac's 180. His comparison also suggests that neither Abraham nor Isaac had experienced the difficulties and distress that Jacob had during his lifetime.

Verses 13-27 demonstrate the fulfillment of Jacob's blessing on Pharaoh (47:10). Joseph was able to save Egypt and its neighbors from a very severe famine and to alleviate the desperate plight of the Egyptians. Pharaoh received money from Egypt and Canaan (vv. 13-14), livestock (vv. 15-17), land and slaves (vv. 18-21, 23, 25), and 20 percent of future harvests (vv. 23-26). Such a tax was not out of line with what was common in that day in the ancient Near East. The average was 33 and 1/3 percent. God blessed Pharaoh because he had blessed the Israelites with the best of Egypt.

Under Joseph's administration Israel prospered and increased in number without suffering deprivation or loss of independence, in contrast to Egypt. God's promise to increase the seed of the patriarchs was taking shape under Joseph's rule. Jacob demonstrated his faith in God's promises by demanding that his sons bury him in the Promised Land (47:29-31; 49:29-32).

Chapter 48. Jacob Adopts and Blesses Joseph's Two Sons. The events recorded in the last three chapters of Genesis deal with the last days of Jacob and Joseph. In these last chapters there are many references to earlier episodes in the book. This very important section (vv. 1-11) explains how Ephraim and Manasseh came to have equal standing with Joseph's brothers and why Joseph did not become the head of a tribe. Manasseh would have been between 20 and 26 years old at this time (41:50; 47:28). Ephraim, of course, was younger. It was as Israel that Jacob performed this official and significant act (vv. 2-4; cf. Heb. 11:21). His action was in harmony with God's will and purpose for the chosen family, and it

involved the patriarchal promises (v. 16).

2

By adopting Joseph's first two sons as his own and giving them equal standing with Joseph's brothers, Jacob bestowed on Joseph the double portion of the birthright (v. 5; cf. v. 22; 1 Chron. 5:1-2). Joseph was the first son of Jacob's intended first wife. Jacob's reference to Rachel (v. 7) shows that she, as the mother of Joseph, was in his mind. This act honored her.

Jacob's eyes were failing (v. 10), so he may not have recognized Ephraim and Manasseh (cf. 27:1). However it seems more likely that by asking "Who are these?" (v. 8) Jacob was identifying the beneficiaries as part of the legal ritual of adoption and/or blessing (cf. 27:18). Jacob gave God the credit for his seeing Joseph's sons (v. 11). He had come to acknowledge God's providential working and grace in his life as he realized how faithful God had been to him in spite of his own unfaithfulness.

This is the first of many scriptural instances of the laying on of hands (v. 14). By this symbolic act, a person transferred a spiritual power or gift to another. This rite was part of the ceremony of dedicating a person or group to an office (Num. 27:18, 23; Deut. 34:9; Matt. 19:13; Acts 6:6; 8:17; etc.), offering sacrifices, and the healings that Jesus Christ and the Apostles performed. In this case Jacob symbolically transferred a blessing from himself to Joseph's sons.

Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh also carried prophetic significance (vv. 19-20). Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged first-born blessing and predicted his preeminence. We can see this blessing being fulfilled during the judges period, when Ephraim had grown very large and influential. This tribe took the lead among the ten northern tribes and flourished to the extent that the Jews used the name Ephraim equally with the name Israel. The tribe occasionally demonstrated an attitude of superiority that we can trace back to this blessing (e.g., Judges 12:1). The reference to Israel in verse 20 applies to the nation in the future, from Jacob's viewpoint.

Joseph Receives the Family Birthright. Jacob firmly believed God's promise to bring his descendants back to the Promised Land (cf. 46:4). Jacob's prophetic promise to Joseph (v. 22) is a play on words. The word for "portion" means ridge or shoulder (of land) and is the same as "Shechem." The Israelites later buried Joseph at Shechem (Josh. 24:32). Jacob regarded the land that he had purchased there (33:18-20) as a pledge of his descendants' future possession of the whole land. In Jesus' day people spoke of Shechem (near Sychar) as what Jacob had given to Joseph (John 4:5).

Jacob spoke as though he had taken Shechem from the Amorites by force (v. 22). Probably Jacob viewed Simeon and Levi's slaughter of the Shechemites as his own taking of the city (34:27-29). Another view is that Moses wrote prophetically. In this usage, which is common in the Old Testament, the writer spoke of the future as past. Since God predicted them by divine inspiration, events yet future are so certain of fulfillment that one could speak of them as already past. Here the thought is that Israel (Jacob) would take Canaan from the Amorites, the most powerful of the Canaanite tribes, not personally, but in his posterity (cf. 15:16). Apparently Jacob gave Joseph Shechem, which he regarded as a down-payment of all that God would give his descendants as they battled the Canaanites in the future.

Chapter 49. Jacob Pronounces His Blessings for All of His Sons. Jacob blessed all twelve of his sons and foretold what would become of each of them and their descendants. He disqualified Reuben, Simeon, and Levi from leadership, giving that blessing to Judah and the birthright double portion to Joseph.

Chapter 49 is the last one in Genesis that gives the destinies of the family members of Abraham's chosen line. It contains blessings, curses, judgments, and promises, all of which are prominent in Genesis. By divine inspiration Jacob foretold major characteristics of each of the twelve tribes that would issue from his twelve sons (v. 1). Each blessing contains at least one of these elements: (1) a synopsis of the son's personality, (2) a hint as to his potential, and (3) a prophecy of his future.

This is the first long poem in the Bible. This chapter, in that it is poetry, seems to be intended to be a high point of the *toledot ya'aqob* (i.e., chaps. 37—50), if not of the whole book of Genesis.

3

This blessing rested on God's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. 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 consequent characters of the patriarchs affected their descendants for generations to come.

Jacob assumed in his blessing that his family would increase and possess the land of Canaan. This optimism reveals his faith. The scope of his prophecy extends into the millennial age. God did not fulfill these prophecies completely during the lifetime of Jacob's sons. He did not do so during Israel's years in the land, beginning with the conquest of Joshua and ending with the captivities. Nor has He yet done so.

Jacob's last words to his sons have become a final statement of the book's major theme: God's plan to restore the lost blessing through the offspring of Abraham. . . . Jacob's words look to the future—"in days to come"—and draw on the past, i.e., God's blessing of mankind.²

Reuben (vv. 1-4). As the first-born, Reuben could have anticipated preeminence among his brothers, leadership of the tribes, priesthood within the family, and the double portion of the birthright. However, he forfeited these blessings, preferring rather to give free reign to his lust (35:22). Leadership of the tribes therefore went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi eventually (cf. Exod. 32:25-29; Num. 1:47-54; 3:12-13), and the double portion to Joseph. The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, no prophet, no priest. Irresolution marked the Reubenites in the time of Israel's judges (Judg. 5:15-16). "From this first oracle the teaching is clear; the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants."³

Simeon and Levi (vv. 5-7). These two were brothers, not only by blood but also in disposition. They were violent, wicked men (34:25-31). Because of their wickedness they would have no independent tribal territory, but their descendants would live scattered among the other tribes. By the second census, just before the Israelites entered Canaan, the Simeonites had become the weakest tribe (Num. 26:14). Moses passed over the Simeonites in his blessing of the Israelites (Deut. 33). This tribe received only a few cities within the allotment of Judah rather than a separate geographical territory (Josh. 19:1-9). The Simeonites eventually lost their tribal identity among the other tribes, especially Judah (cf. 1 Chron. 4:27, 38-43).

The Levites also received no large land grant, but Joshua gave them several cities in which they lived among the other tribes (Josh. 21:1-40). The Levites gained a special blessing at Mt. Sinai by siding with Moses when the other Israelites apostatized (Exod. 32:26-28; Num. 3:5-13; 18:6-32).

Judah (vv. 8-12). Judah possessed a lion-like nature. As such he became the leader of the other tribes (43:3-10; Judg. 1:1-2; 3:9; 20:18; etc.). Through him came David and Messiah, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Judah led the other tribes in the march through the wilderness (Num. 2:1-3) and in the monarchy. The scepter (v. 10) was and is the symbol of royal command, the right to rule. Judah was to exercise leadership among the tribes until Shiloh came at which time Shiloh would extend Judah's rule to world-wide dominion. Judah's leadership was not consistently preeminent in the history of Israel, however.

Shiloh (lit. the "bearer of rest") is a proper name. It refers here, not to the city in Canaan of that name, but to a person who would arise in the tribe of Judah and bring peace to the world, namely, Messiah (cf. 3:15; Num. 24:17). We should probably translate it "whose it (the ruler's staff) is" or "to whom it

2 John H. Sailhamer, "Genesis," in *Genesis-Numbers*, Vol. 2 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin and Richard P. Polcyn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990), 274, 275.

3 Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18—50*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament series (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 647.

belongs” rather than transliterate it “Shiloh” (cf. Ezek. 21:26-27).⁴

4

Because Reuben, Simeon, and Levi had disqualified themselves, Judah received the leadership of the tribes and the blessing that normally went to the first-born. This is how the leadership of the tribes and the Messianic line fell to Judah. Jacob forgave Judah's earlier sins because he repented and later sacrificed himself for Jacob's well-being.

Everything after "Until" (v. 10) describes millennial conditions. This prophecy is the first of many in the Old Testament that associate bumper crops with the golden age of future blessing.

Zebulun (v. 13). His tribe later obtained territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This was a thriving commercial area though Zebulun may never have had permanent “waterfront property.” It is possible, however, that Zebulun and Issachar shared some territory (cf. Deut. 33:18-19), so Zebulun could have bordered the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the men of Zebulun worked for the Phoenicians in their maritime trade (cf. Deut. 33:19). Zebulun will extend to the sea in the Millennium when his borders will extend as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean (cf. Ezek. 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through his territory.

Issachar (vv. 14-15). They would prefer an agricultural way of life and what it produced rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Lower Galilee including the valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area.

Dan (vv. 16-18). He would be a judge in Israel. This prophecy came to reality partially during Samson's judgeship. Dan's victories benefited all Israel. Yet this tribe led Israel into idolatry (Judg. 18) and was therefore similar to a serpent (v. 17). Jacob asked Yahweh to deliver his descendants in the future (v. 18).

Jacob's heartfelt aside in 18 is enigmatic: it could arise from a father's prayer, like Abraham's for Ishmael (17:18), or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery, long renounced, called up by the acts and the words (heels, vv. 17, 19) associated with his own name.⁵

Gad (v. 19). They would also be effective in battle.

Asher (v. 20). They would enjoy very fruitful soil, namely, the lowlands of the Carmel range north along the Mediterranean coast. This area contained some of the most fertile land in Canaan.

Naphtali (v. 21). They evidently would enjoy the admiration and appreciation of the other tribes in a special way (cf. Judg. 4 and 5).

Joseph (vv. 22-26). His blessing was especially abundant. The two tribes that bore his sons' names would see its fulfillment even though during his lifetime Joseph had faced much opposition. Judah received the leadership of the tribes, but Joseph obtained the double portion of the birthright (cf. 1 Chron. 5:2).

Benjamin (v. 27). He produced many warriors in Israel's history (e.g., Ehud, Saul, Jonathan) and demonstrated a warlike character among the tribes (Judg. 5:14; 20:16; 1 Chron. 8:40; ch. 12; 2 Chron. 14:8; 17:17).

Chapters 49:29—50:26. Deaths and Burial Arrangements. Joseph received permission from Pharaoh to bury Jacob in Canaan as he had requested. He then assured his brothers of his favor in spite of how they had treated him and testified that God would fulfill His promises.

4 See Eugene H. Merrill, "Rashi, Nicholas de Lyra, and Christian Exegesis," *Westminster Theological Journal* 38 (1975):74-75.

5 Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 220.

Jacob again expressed his faith in God's promises that Canaan would be Israel's homeland by requesting burial in the Cave of Machpelah near Hebron (49:29-32; cf. 47:29-31). He died peacefully and was "gathered to his people" (reunited with his ancestors, implying life after death, in the place of departed spirits). He was 147 when he died (47:28). Joseph had Jacob's body preserved as a mummy (50:2).

5

Jacob's elaborate funeral was probably due both to the high regard in which the Egyptians held him as Joseph's father and to the Egyptians' love of showy funeral ceremonies (vv. 7-10). It is the grandest state funeral recorded in the Bible, appropriate since Jacob's story spans more than half of Genesis. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob just two days less than they normally mourned the death of a Pharaoh.

The record of Jacob's burial in the land is important to the purpose of Genesis. God had promised the land to Abraham and had given the patriarchs small portions of it. The faith of these men that God would fulfill His promises and do for their descendants all that He had promised is obvious in their view of Canaan as their homeland. They counted on the future faithfulness of God who had proved Himself faithful to them personally during their lifetimes.

The words of Joseph's brothers were probably not true (vv. 16-17). The brothers feared because of their uneasy consciences rather than Joseph's behavior (cf. v. 19). Joseph's response to his fearful brothers reveals his attitudes toward God and them (vv. 18-21). He humbled himself under God's authority. He regarded God as sovereign over him, as the One who had providentially guided all the events of his life. He knew that God's purposes for him, his family, and all people were good. Consequently he behaved with tender compassion toward his brothers. He proved to be his brothers' keeper (cf. 4:9).

Each sentence of his threefold reply is a pinnacle of Old Testament (and New Testament) faith. To leave all the righting of one's wrongs to God (19; cf. Rom. 12:19; 1 Thes. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19); to see His providence in man's malice (20; cf. on 45:5); and to repay evil not only with forgiveness but also with practical affection (21; cf. Luke 6:27ff.), are attitudes which anticipate the adjective "Christian" and even "Christlike."⁶

Joseph lived to see God's blessing on his children's children. He died 54 years after Jacob's death when he was 110 years old. He probably could have been buried in a pyramid or had some other grand burial in Egypt. However, he wanted his family to embalm and place his body in a coffin in Egypt. Later descendants would bury him in the Promised Land near Shechem, in the parcel of land his father had bought and gave to him (48:22; cf. Josh. 24:32). This expression of Joseph's faith in God's promises to his forefathers provides a fitting climax for the Book of Genesis and the formative period of Israel's history.

The outstanding feature of Joseph's life had been faithful loyalty to God under all circumstances.⁷

The story of Joseph illustrates patient faith and its reward. It ends the book of Genesis and brings its theme to a literary climax. ... But the story of Joseph shows us that the road to victory, dominion, mastery, and judicial authority, is through the humble service of a slave. Through service and suffering, God purges and destroys indwelling sin in a believer (not completely, but sufficiently), builds character in him, and fits him for the mastery of the world.⁸

The Book of Genesis, like the Old Testament in microcosm, ends by pointing beyond its own story. ... Joseph's dying words epitomized the hope in which the Old Testament, and indeed

6 Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries series (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 224.

7 W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1946), 379.

8 James B. Jordan, "Rebellion, Tyranny, and Dominion in the Book of Genesis" (*Christianity and Civilization* 3 (Summer 1983):38-80), 67-68.

the New (cf. Rev. 22:20), would fall into expectant silence: *God will surely visit you.*⁹

*Extracted from Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Genesis,” 2004 Edition, except where otherwise noted.

⁹ Kidner, p. 224.