

PATRIARCHS: Lesson Ten, Israel Moves to Egypt and Prospers ***Genesis 46-50***

Subject: Israel moved to Egypt, prospered, blessed his sons, and died showing faith.

Main Idea: The habits we develop largely determine whether or not we finish our lives well, as Jacob did.

Principles:

1. *Mature believers follow the Lord wherever He leads them.*
2. *Mature believers are constantly in awe of God.*
3. *Mature believers are focused on blessing others.*
4. *Mature believers are full of faith.*

Introduction

In 2009, I had the opportunity to visit the Billy Graham Library in Charlotte, North Carolina, where the life of the elderly, world-renowned evangelist is memorialized. His wife Ruth is buried there. Apparently, she once saw on a construction road sign the words which she requested to have placed on her gravestone. Her gravestone reads, “End of construction. Thank you for your patience.”

As we come to the end of the lives of Jacob and Joseph at the conclusion of the book of Genesis, it is abundantly clear that these two men determined to finish their lives well. They were willing to remain under God’s “construction” right until the end. The apostle Paul also determined to end well. He wrote, “*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:6-8). Paul lived with eternity in view.

Not all of the characters in the Bible finished the course of their lives well. But Jacob and Joseph certainly did. They modeled mature faith and a strong finish. Finishing the course of our lives well is not easy; it may even be unnatural. Life is difficult. As we experience more and more difficulties, it is natural to long for a comfortable, easier life. We may feel we have already made enough sacrifices, we have suffered enough for Christ’s sake, we have had our season of serving. Peter understood this. Therefore, at the end of his life, he encouraged others to keep “mak[ing] every effort.” If we do, we will not stumble, now nor as we grow older, and we will “receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 1:5-11). Surely if anyone could claim they had endured enough, Paul, Peter, Jacob and Joseph could have! But they continued making every effort and in so doing, modeled mature faith for us.

How can we be sure to finish well? God’s sanctifying work in us is mysterious in that He begins and finishes the work (Philippians 1:6, 2:13) and yet, at the same time, we also have a part (Philippians 2:12). For *our* part, the habits we establish largely determine what we will become. It has been wisely said that our direction, not our intentions, determines our destination.¹ It is never too late to establish habits that will enable us to remain on course, right to the end of our lives.

I. **Israel Moved to Egypt** – Genesis 46:1 – 47:12

A. **God Spoke To Jacob** – 46:1-4

- i. Sacrifices to “the God of his father Isaac”: Once Jacob was convinced Joseph was alive and was urging him to come to Egypt, Jacob and his household set out. However eager Jacob was to see his son, he apparently had hesitations about going.
 1. 46:1 tells us that Jacob went to Beersheba along the way to offer sacrifices “to the God of his father Isaac.”
 - a. The words, “God of his father Isaac” link Jacob to the Patriarchal promises. As we have learned, the Patriarchs understood God had promised the land of Canaan to them. Jacob was cognizant of this. He must have taken the idea of leaving Canaan seriously. When he fled Canaan in his younger years for Paddan Aram, he almost was prevented from returning by Laban.
 - b. The author’s mention of Jacob’s sacrifices to “the God of his father Isaac” also reminds us that Isaac once received a very specific instruction from the Lord, also in a time of famine, *not* to leave Canaan for Egypt (26:2).
 2. Abraham *did* go to Egypt during a famine, but the trip ended with Abraham being thrown out of the country by Pharaoh (12:20). Later, Abraham went to great lengths to ensure Isaac did not leave Canaan to find a wife (24:1-9).
 3. There was yet another reason Jacob may have been concerned about leaving Canaan. The Lord told Abraham that his descendants would live for four hundred years as strangers in a foreign country. He said they would be enslaved and mistreated there but guaranteed He would bring them back to Canaan. Jacob must have been aware of all God’s promises and prophecy to his father and grandfather. The idea of leading his family into enslavement seemed unlikely at the time because of Joseph’s position, but he would not have forgotten about the prophecy.
 4. Offering sacrifices was a means of worshipping. The Lord appeared to Jacob when he left Canaan as a young man and promised to bring him back (28:15). It seems Jacob was hoping to hear from God once again before leaving Canaan.
- ii. Beersheba: Beersheba was a place of special importance to the Patriarchs. Isaac had built an altar there, and it was also where the Lord appeared and reconfirmed the patriarchal promises to him (26:23-25). It only made sense that Jacob would want to return to this special place before leaving Canaan, especially if he was seeking confirmation from the “God of his father Isaac” about leaving Canaan.

iii. God's Confirmation

1. The Lord, indeed, appeared to Jacob at Beersheba. He identified Himself to Jacob as “the God of your father.” Then He specifically addressed the concern: “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again” (46:3-4).
2. The fact that He began with the words, “*Do not be afraid* to go down to Egypt” most certainly implies that, as eager as he was to see Joseph, Jacob had been afraid to leave Canaan. But now, Jacob knew he was not only going to Egypt because Joseph was calling him there. He was going at God's leading.

B. The Company of Travelers – 46:5-27

i. “Seventy in all”

1. Jacob's family had grown. His twelve sons now had their own sons, and all these are named for us, beginning with the six sons of Leah, followed by Leah's maidservant's two sons and their families, then the two sons of Rachel and their sons, and finally the two sons of Rachel's maidservant and their sons.
2. The members listed total seventy (Dinah is not counted). This number includes the two deceased sons of Judah (Er and Onan, 46:12) and some others who, it seems most likely, had not yet been born (such as the ten sons of the young Benjamin or the two grandsons of Judah through the young Perez). The author considered that these traveled to Egypt in the sense that they traveled as seed (in the loins) of their fathers.ⁱⁱ
3. There is no explanation about how Moses arrived at the number sixty-six (46:27) and many suggestions have been made. Most consider Joseph and his two sons to be among the four excluded, but suggestions about the fourth person include Jacob, Dinah, Serah (verse 17).ⁱⁱⁱ Excluding Ephraim and Manasseh (who were born in Egypt) and Er and Onan (who died in Canaan) from the total of seventy is yet another possibility.
4. The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) and Acts 7:14 give seventy-five as the total number. The Septuagint also lists Joseph as having a total of nine sons. Omitting Jacob and Joseph from the tally but including nine sons of Joseph would total seventy-five.

ii. Implications

1. The large size of Jacob's family hints at the growth that would occur in Egypt. They went into Egypt as a large family; they would come out an emerging nation. Each son of Jacob would become a tribe of Israel.
2. The size of Jacob's family is also another reminder that God's promise to give Abraham many descendants was being fulfilled.

C. Israel Settled in Goshen – 46:28 – 47:12

- i. Judah Sent Ahead: Jacob now recognized Judah as the leader he had proved himself to be. He sent him ahead to get directions to Goshen, the place that Joseph had indicated he planned to settle them (45:10).
- ii. Joseph and Jacob Reunited
 1. As soon as Joseph learned of their arrival, he went to meet the party. Not surprisingly, tears and embraces marked his reunion with his father. Joseph had last seen his father twenty-two years earlier: thirteen years between Joseph's sale into Egypt and his exaltation, seven years of plenty following his exaltation, and two years of famine (45:6)!
 2. Jacob said he was ready to die after seeing Joseph, but in fact, we learn that he lived another seventeen years in Egypt (47:9, 28).
- iii. Joseph's Brothers Introduced to Pharaoh:
 1. Joseph coached his brothers to tell Pharaoh they were shepherds (or raisers of livestock) so they would be permitted to remain in Goshen, a rich land.
 - a. In this way, they would be allowed to remain separate from the Egyptians, since they detested shepherds (46:34).
 - b. This was surely God's plan, as well as Joseph's, for Israel was to remain a distinct people group and not to intermarry with pagans (such as the Canaanites and Egyptians.)
 2. Joseph brought five of his brothers to represent the rest. His plan worked and Pharaoh gave them the best grazing land, Goshen, and even invited them to take charge of some of his own flocks.
- iv. Jacob's Blessing on Pharaoh
 1. Joseph introduced his father to Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh twice, at the beginning and at the end of their conversation.
 2. Jacob indicated to Pharaoh that the years of his "pilgrimage" were 130 at that time. His words were a testimony to Pharaoh that Jacob considered his life merely a pilgrimage. His heavenly home was his destination.

3. Jacob had every reason to want to bless the Egyptian Pharaoh. After all, he had exalted his son Joseph to the highest position in the land. Jacob also had confidence that his family was exactly where God wanted them to be. He, therefore, had every reason to want Pharaoh to prosper.
- v. Joseph Settled His Father's Household in Goshen
 1. Rameses was a city in the northeast delta region that was built by Jacob's descendants, after they became slaves in Egypt, as one of two store cities (Exodus 1:11).
 2. Joseph settled his father's household there and provided food for them. The provisions for Jacob's family are described as very generous.

Summary Statement: It was under God's direction and with His promises that Israel went to Egypt. Jacob was nearing the end of his life and wanted to finish well in obedience to his God.

Principle: *Mature believers follow the Lord wherever He leads them.*

Some are called by God to make geographical moves, as Jacob was. But for *all* believers, following the Lord's leading involves willingness to do *whatever* He asks of us, even the smallest acts of obedience.

Illustration: Francis Chan, a sought-after author and speaker, started a church in his Southern California home with thirty people that grew to 4,000 members. In 2010, he suddenly left but not for the reasons pastors of western mega-churches have a growing reputation for leaving. Francis Chan did not fall into some sort of sin. Francis Chan simply turned his back on acclaim in order to follow Christ's call to serve the poor and needy. He has joined the ranks of many men and women who have followed the Lord's leading sacrificially. Many have sold everything to go to the ends of the earth for Christ's sake.

Application: Is following the Lord's leading your *habit*? How do you respond when the Lord asks something difficult of you? For some, it may be a geographical relocation, a job change, the release or renewal of a relationship that is difficult for you to obey. However, sometimes it can be the very smallest acts of obedience that we find most difficult. Is the Lord telling you that it is time to change your eating habits, the entertainment you seek, or the manner in which you communicate with a family member? Philippians 2:13 tells us that God works in us to *will* and to work according to His good purpose. Will you ask Him to make you *willing* to obey Him in all things?

The habits we establish now determine what we will do and be in the future. What habits have you established to ensure you *hear* the Lord’s voice leading you? Is it your habit to “go to Beersheba” daily, to spend meaningful time in quiet Bible reading and prayer, listening for God to speak to you? Perhaps if you have the “habit” of a daily devotional time, you are so eager to spill your problems out to God that you have forgotten to listen to what *He* wants to say to *you*. You may *intend* to follow the Lord, but are you in the *habit* of listening and following?

Transition: After seeking the Lord, Jacob moved to Egypt and there his family prospered.

II. Israel Prospered in Egypt – Genesis 47:13-31

A. Egypt Suffered From the Famine – 47:13-26

- i. The Severity of the Famine: The famine was so severe that Egypt and Canaan are described as “wasting away” (47:13). Pharaoh sent the people to Joseph for assistance.
- ii. Joseph’s Plan
 1. First, Joseph gave grain in exchange for money. Once the people ran out of money, he sold them grain in exchange for their livestock. Finally, once their money and livestock were both gone, the people asked Joseph to save their lives by buying them and their land, reducing them to servitude (47:19, 21).
 2. Some have accused Joseph of being too severe in his treatment of the Egyptians.
 - a. However, a careful reading of the text shows that the Egyptians did not see him this way; they were exceedingly grateful to him (47:25).
 - b. Moreover, in Near Eastern antiquity, debt slaves generally had the opportunity to regain their freedom once their debt was paid. Therefore, we are left to believe that this enslavement was not permanent.
 - c. Additionally, slaves of this sort were of a different (better) status than war captives and other foreigners who were forced into slavery.^{iv}
 - d. Joseph established a system that was actually more of a tenant situation, by which the Egyptians were permitted to keep four-fifths of their crops for themselves (47:26). It was a system of taxation.
 - e. Therefore, we can fairly conclude that Joseph was a conscientious overseer of Egypt, not a tyrant.

- iii. Partial Fulfillment of Prophecy: Joseph was a blessing to Egypt and all the nations around it. We must see this as a partial fulfillment of God's patriarchal promise that through Abraham He would bless the entire world (12:3).

B. Israel Flourished – 47:27-31

- i. Sharp juxtaposition
 1. While the Egyptians sold themselves and their property, in sharp juxtaposition, Jacob's household acquired property and was fruitful. They increased greatly in number (47:27).
 2. While the Egyptians were taxed, the Israelites received open-handed provisions from Joseph (47:12).
 3. Jacob enjoyed a longer life than expected (42:37; 43:27; 44:20, 22, 29, 31; 45:3), another seventeen years.
- ii. Joseph's Vow
 1. When Jacob finally believed he was about to die, he called Joseph and asked him to vow he would not bury him in Egypt. He wanted to be buried in Canaan with his fathers. Joseph agreed to do this.
 2. Jacob's request to be buried in Canaan is an indication of his confidence in the fulfillment of God's promise to give Canaan to his descendants. He was aligning himself with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac, as an inheritor of the patriarchal promises and a man of faith. Hebrews 11:13 tells us that the Patriarchs died without receiving what they were promised. It says they died in faith, confident God would fulfill His promises in the future.
- iii. Israel Worshipped
 1. Genesis 47:31 says after Joseph made the promise, Israel bowed himself. Some interpret this to mean that Jacob bowed before Joseph in gratitude for his vow. But it seems more likely that Jacob bowed in worship. King David did the same on his deathbed (1 Kings 1:47). This is affirmed by Hebrews 11:21, which says that Jacob worshipped.
 2. With Joseph's assurance that he would be buried in Canaan, Jacob had so much for which to worship God: the Lord had transformed his character and renamed him accordingly; the Lord had reunited his family, bringing Joseph back "from the dead" (for Jacob thought he was dead for over twenty years); the Lord was prospering his family in a foreign land and using his son Joseph to bless the nations.

Summary Statement: While Egypt suffered, Israel flourished, giving him many reasons to worship.

Principle: *Mature believers are constantly in awe of God.*

Application: Do you find yourself spontaneously in awe of God throughout each day? The Bible tells us, again and again, to praise the Lord and to be thankful. Spontaneous worship occurs most often in people who have developed the *habit* of thinking and responding to life's circumstances with praise and thanksgiving.

If you are a person who is more likely to see the difficulties than the benefits in each circumstance, you may have to work harder at this. Every believer should develop this habit of praise and thanksgiving. You might begin by making a daily list of the ways God has been especially good to you and the ways in which you have seen Him at work. You might begin by doing this each night as you are falling asleep. The Psalmist wrote, "On my bed I remember you; I think of you through the watches of the night" (Psalm 63:6). Maybe you need to use your mealtime to praise and thank the Lord for as many things as you can. I keep a sign on which I have written, "Give Thanks" in a prominent place for my own benefit. What will help *you* develop habits of praise and thanksgiving?

Because life is difficult, if we don't learn to respond with praise and thanksgiving, we will inevitably be embittered over time. On the other hand, do you know Christians who exude thanksgiving and praise to God? It is almost certain that they are the most joyful Christians you know! Which kind of a person do you want to become?

Transition: "Some time later," Joseph was told his father was ill. He returned to his bedside with his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Israel "rallied his strength" (48:2) to give his final blessings. First, he met with Joseph. Later, his other sons also gathered to be blessed by him.

III. Israel Blessed His Sons – Genesis 48:1 – 49:28

A. Joseph's Double Portion – 48:1-22

- i. God Almighty (El Shaddai): Jacob began by reviewing the promises God made when He appeared to him at Bethel (28:13-15), also known as Luz (28:19), emphasizing blessing, many descendants, and land. He referred to the Lord as "God Almighty". This term is used throughout Genesis in connection with God's covenant promises to the Patriarchs. What God promises to do, He is powerful enough to accomplish.
- ii. Joseph's Sons Adopted
 1. Jacob gave Joseph the double portion of inheritance that normally belonged to the firstborn son by, in essence, adopting Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons.
 - a. They would each inherit a portion of Jacob's possessions and a portion of land in Canaan, along with their uncles.

- b. Therefore, Manasseh and Ephraim are named in the Bible among the “tribes” of Israel. While Jacob’s other sons are each named as one tribe, Joseph is named as two tribes, each using a name of one of his sons.
 - 2. By granting Joseph the double blessing, Jacob was also honoring his deceased wife Rachel, whom he mentioned on this occasion.
- iii. Joseph’s Sons’ Blessed
 - 1. *Awareness of Sons’ Presence*
 - a. It seems as if Jacob then noticed two figures in the room with him and Joseph for the first time. His eyes were failing and so he asked Joseph who accompanied him. Joseph told him Manasseh and Ephraim were present with him. This became an occasion for Jacob to bless his two adopted sons.
 - b. Joseph’s sons apparently knelt between Jacob’s knees so that he could kiss and embrace them.
 - c. Joseph moved them aside in order to bow before his father. Then he returned his sons to their previous position in order that they might receive his father’s blessing.
 - 2. *Jacob’s Blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh*
 - a. *His Shepherd:* Jacob called upon the God of his fathers, the God who had become his own Shepherd, to bless the two. He recognized the Lord as the One who had been his Shepherd all his life (48:15). What may have been in Jacob’s mind when he said this?
 - i. Don’t you think he recalled God meeting him at Bethel when he, the homebody, left alone for Paddan Aram, where God promised to go with him and to bring him back?
 - ii. Don’t you think he recalled how God caused him to prosper when Laban was trying to cheat him?
 - iii. Don’t you think he remembered that God told him when it was time to go back to Canaan with his wives and children?
 - iv. Don’t you think he realized God had sustained him in his confusion and grief over what he thought was Joseph’s death, during those 22 years of mourning?
 - v. Wouldn’t he have remembered that God appeared to him seventeen years earlier in Beersheba and assured him he was in line with His will by taking his family into Egypt?
 - vi. Truly, God had been his Shepherd!

- b. *A Reversal*: Jacob surprised Joseph by insisting on granting the younger of his two sons, Ephraim, the greater blessing.
 - i. This was in line with Jacob’s own experience. He was blessed over his older twin Esau. His father Isaac had been blessed over Isaac’s elder brother Ishmael.
 - ii. This reversal was countercultural, but God works in unexpected ways! He is not bound by human convention. Often, He even chooses people whom we might least expect Him to use.
- iv. Land for Joseph: Jacob gave Joseph a specific piece of land in Canaan. The text indicates he gave him one more “portion” or “ridge of land”. (Jacob’s taking of this land is not mentioned anywhere else in Scripture.) The Hebrew for the words translated “portion” or “ridge of land” are identical to the place name “Shechem”. Jacob seems to have used a word play to indicate the location. This is supported by the fact that Joseph was buried by his descendants in Shechem over 400 years later (Joshua 24:32).

B. Joseph’s Deathbed Blessing – 49:1-28 Jacob then called all his sons to him in order to give his deathbed blessing to each one. The first three sons’ “blessing” actually was a condemnation of their behavior, which would, according to the prophecy, have an impact on their descendants. The blessing was understood by all to be a prophecy.

- i. Reuben: Jacob denounced Reuben for having slept with his wife Bilhah (35:22). As firstborn, he should have received the double portion, but he lost his place of leadership by his deplorable act. The leadership was transferred to Judah and the double portion to Joseph.
- ii. Simeon and Levi: These two sons were cursed because of their joint role in massacring the Shechemites (Genesis 34). Later, both tribes were scattered, just as the prophecy foretold.
 1. In Moses’ day, the Levites helped overturn their curse by showing zeal for the Lord (Exodus 32:26). The tribe of Levi was honored for their act with the privilege of becoming the tribe through which Israel’s priests would descend. However, they were scattered nonetheless. The Levites did not receive a parcel of land in Canaan but were given cities spread throughout the land belonging to the other tribes (Numbers 35:7). This scattering served to bless the other tribes.
 2. The tribe of Simeon was absorbed into the tribe of Judah once Israel returned to Canaan. In this way, his descendants were “scattered”.

iii. Judah

1. Judah's blessing recalls the meaning of his name, *praise* (compare Genesis 29:35 and 49:8).
 2. Jacob spoke of Judah as the leader among his brothers and the victor over his enemies.
 3. The meaning of the phrase "until it comes to the one to whom it belongs" has been traditionally interpreted by Christian and Jewish scholars as a reference to the Messiah (Matthew 1:1-17).
 - a. Some older translations have the word "Shiloh" inserted. But this is properly rendered, "Whose it is," so that the phrase reads, "the scepter will not depart from Judah... until He comes Whose it is (or *to Whom it belongs*)".^v It is a Messianic reference.^{vi}
 - b. "The scepter not departing" refers to the kingly line of David. God also promised David that one of his descendants would always sit on the throne. That promise was fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, who will one day reign as King of kings and Lord of lords.
 - c. Most certainly, "the obedience of the nations" can only be ascribed as belonging to Messiah.
 4. "Wine" and "milk" were valuable commodities. The tribe of Judah inherited land rich with these. However, some see in this a reference to the future opulence in the millennial reign of Christ.
 5. Many Christian interpreters have seen specific references to the person and work of Christ in the vine, the donkey, the wine, and the blood.
 6. The blessing, therefore, seems to extend beyond the time of Judah, beyond the time of the kingdom of Israel, and even possibly beyond the First Advent of Christ to the time of His Second Coming.
- iv. Zebulun: The tract of land in Canaan inherited by the tribe of Zebulun was not on the coast but adjacent to the land of Asher, which did border the Mediterranean coast, as well as Phoenicia, of which Sidon was a capital city. However, Zebulun's association with these things is justified given that major thoroughfares traversed Zebulun, granting access to the seafaring trade, which Sidon represents.^{vii}
- v. Issachar: Issachar's territory was very fertile, a good "resting place," a "pleasant land." However, his descendants were granted "ease at the cost of liberty" (in the words of Delitzsch).^{viii} Invading armies from the north had to cross it to reach the capital cities of Israel's northern and southern kingdoms. And in the eighth to sixth centuries B.C., it often fell subject to occupying forces.^{ix}

- vi. Dan: “Dan” means “to judge or contend”. Jacob’s blessing is, therefore, a play on the meaning of his name. Some have noted that Israel’s judge, Samson, was from the tribe of Dan. He used ruthless tactics against Israel’s enemies. While Dan is called upon to provide justice, the blessing portrays Dan as actually an endangerment. During the time of the Judges, the tribe of Dan was responsible for endangering Israel by initiating idolatry (Judges 18:30). Samson’s ruthless dealings with Israel’s enemies could also be in view.
- vii. “I look for your deliverance, Lord.”
1. Jacob interrupted his blessing, without explanation, by interjecting a cry for the Lord’s deliverance. The hope of the ancients was in the ultimate deliverance promised to Eve (Genesis 3:15), a deliverance obtained by Messiah.
 2. Jacob’s statement may have resulted from his vision of the dangers that would come upon Israel, alluded to in his prophecy about Dan.
 3. It is also possible that this was a joyful cry from Jacob, expressing his longing and expectation of the Deliverer, Messiah.
 - a. Perhaps as the Lord inspired his prophetic blessings, his thinking was increasingly directed toward the deliverance Messiah would bring.
 - b. Some scholars see this expression relating to the reference to Samson and the tribe of Dan, as a manner of saying, “I do not put my hope in Samson but in Messiah for ultimate deliverance”.^x
- viii. Gad: The position of the tribe of Gad, along with the tribe of Reuben and the half-tribe of Manasseh, along the eastern coast of the Jordan required these tribes to be the first line of Israel’s defense against attacking Arameans, Ammonites, and Moabites, Israel’s enemies.
- ix. Asher: Asher’s position along the Mediterranean coast gave his people easy access to rich delicacies found in Phoenicia and through sea trade.
- x. Naphtali: Naphtali is described as a free doe bearing beautiful fawns. Although the land of Naphtali, in the upper, western region of Galilee, was one of the northern tribes, no northern border was specifically delineated for it when the tribes received their land allotments. This, perhaps, accounts for Jacob’s reference to freedom, since it could be assumed that greater freedom of movement was permitted to Naphtali than to those northern tribes that shared borders with Israel’s enemies.

xi. Joseph

1. Jacob's blessing to Joseph is the longest of the twelve. He and Judah are highlighted in Jacob's blessing. The southern kingdom of Israel became known as "Judah" because that tribe so dominated the territory. The tribe of Ephraim (one of Joseph's sons) dominated the northern kingdom (called "Israel"). Therefore, by the domination of Joseph and Judah of their brothers, we receive foreshadowing of what their descendants would also do.
2. Joseph is portrayed as a "fruitful vine", implying prosperity, which was especially true of Ephraim.
3. The prophecy moves immediately to describe the danger of being attacked by hostile, bitter archers. These can only be a reference to Joseph's mistreatment by his own brothers. Nevertheless, as the prophecy indicates, the Lord sustained him.
4. Again, Jacob refers to the Lord as the Shepherd. Jacob and Joseph came to know the Lord as Protector and Guide (functions of a Shepherd) in unique ways during their lifetimes.
5. Jacob called Joseph "the prince among his brothers" (49:26), which was literally the case because of his role in Egypt.

xii. Benjamin: Benjamin is described as a ravenous, devouring wolf. The Benjamites were known for cruelty (Judges 20). However, the wolf imagery also suggests daring and aggression. Israel's first king, Saul, and another man by the same name, Saul of Tarsus (also known as the apostle Paul), were both Benjamites.

xiii. These, Moses concludes, were the twelve tribes of Israel. With the inclusion of both sons of Joseph, the number twelve is maintained in counting the tribes by the omission of one of the other tribes, normally Levi (Numbers 1, 13) or Simeon (Deuteronomy 33).

Summary Statement: Jacob blessed each son by name, indicating that each had a unique role. While the eldest three were chastened, the summary in 49:28 indicates that all the sons were blessed, in a general way. Jacob sought to impact the lives of his sons as long as he had the breath of life within him.

Principle: *Mature believers are focused on blessing others.*

None of us knows what our health will be like as we age. Some will have more physical strength with which to be of service than others. However, there is no Biblical model for retirement from Christian service. The Christian with a vibrant walk with Christ will always seek to minister to others, in one way or another.

Illustration: Esther Hammond, one of our grandmothers, intended to minister to others as long as she lived. She lived most of her adult life in Cambodia with her husband, working to translate the Bible into the Cambodian language. After they returned to the United States, she helped care for him as he struggled with dementia. Once her husband went to be with the Lord, she continued to look for ways to help others, even into her nineties. We remember a conversation in which she told us that she had just come in from sweeping the patio of the “old man” (in his eighties) who lived not far from her. Most of her time, though, was spent writing letters. She remembered how much that communication meant to her when she lived abroad and determined to bring others encouragement in the same way. Every day she wrote many letters in her neat script.

Another dear saint, Alice Zimmerman, helped women study the Bible for many years. As she aged, she suffered from cancer, diabetes, and rheumatoid arthritis, resulting in a leg amputation and two completely deformed, useless hands. A couple of years ago, she was also diagnosed with Alzheimer’s Syndrome. It is increasingly difficult for her older husband, who has a bad back, to lift her from her bed to her wheelchair. And it is impossible for Alice to feed herself, hold a pen, or type on a keyboard. Despite all this, Alice and Dale are sincere worshippers, full of praise and thanksgiving! They are truly the most joyful people I know. Among the things to which they are committed is serving others, in whatever manner they can, as long as they live. In a joint effort, they write and distribute devotional prayers each month, especially for the edification of pastors and other Christian workers.

On one occasion, the apostle Paul and his coworker Silas were beaten and imprisoned in Philippi. They had a powerful impact on other prisoners by singing and praising God throughout the night of their imprisonment (Acts 16:22-34).

Application: When God is actively working *in* us, His work naturally flows *through* us to impact others. If we no longer have interest in impacting others, it is an indication that our *own* spiritual lives are stale and that *we* have stopped growing! Whatever our limitations, there is some way in which we can be a blessing.

No matter how reserved we are, by nature, all of us are called to be ministers of Christ Jesus. It is the most important work you will do! Have you already developed the mindset of service? Blessing others is most basic to the Christian life (Matthew 20:26, Ephesians 6:7).

Transition: After Jacob blessed his sons he gave them final instructions.

IV. Israel Died Showing Faith – Genesis 48:29 – 50:26

A. Jacob's Death and Burial – 49:29 – 50:14

i. Final Instructions

1. Jacob told all his sons to bury him in Canaan with Abraham and Isaac. Sarah was the first to be buried on this land. Isaac's wife Rebekah was also buried there. Here we learn for the first time that Jacob had buried Leah there. The less loved of the sisters he had married was the one honored to be buried alongside him.
2. With this final word of instruction, Jacob breathed his last breath and "was gathered to his people". We are reminded that, while Jacob's pilgrimage on earth ended, his death was not final. He joined the living company of the faithful who had gone before him.

ii. Joseph had Jacob embalmed.

iii. The Funeral Processional

1. For the first time in thirty-nine years (twenty-two of which preceded Jacob's arrival in Egypt and seventeen of which followed it), Joseph went back to Canaan. However, this was the last time Joseph stepped foot in Canaan. His bones were carried out of Egypt four hundred years later, and he was buried there.
2. All the dignitaries of Egypt and chariots and horsemen accompanied the sons of Jacob to bury him. It was quite a processional! The Canaanites recognized it as an important occasion (50:11).

B. Jacob's Sons' Concern – 50:15-21

- i. Following Jacob's burial and their return to Egypt, Joseph's brothers' fears awakened. Apparently, they never believed Joseph had truly forgiven them and thought, with their father gone, he might seek revenge.
- ii. They sent a message to Joseph stating that their father left a request that he forgive them. When Joseph received the message, he wept. It grieved him deeply to think his brothers had never understood the totality of his forgiveness and his complete trust in God.
- iii. Then Joseph's brothers literally threw themselves down before him, saying, "We are your slaves" (50:18).
- iv. Joseph responded by telling them not to be afraid. He said, "You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (50:20).
 1. Joseph affirmed his confidence in God's providential oversight of all circumstances.
 2. The Bible's teaching about providence raises concerns over the relationship between human freedom of choice (freewill) and God's sovereign control. Can they co-exist?

3. Dr. Walt Kaiser answers the question this way: *“God need not worry that his purposes will be countermandated by society’s sinful actions. Nor will God have to limit the freedoms which all individuals have, both believers and unbelievers, in order to preserve his sovereignty. He can cope with it, and he does succeed. The result is that God remains God and individuals remain responsible, blameworthy and culpable for all their acts. There is both a directive will and a permissive will in the divine purpose. Men and women may be culpable and blameworthy for an act such as crucifying the Lord of glory, but as a permitted act it can still come under the total plan of God.”*^{xi}
- v. Joseph “spoke kindly to them” (50:21) and affirmed his intention to provide for them and their children.

C. Joseph’s Death – 50:22-26

- i. Joseph lived to be 110 years old. Egyptian records indicate that twenty pharaohs lived to the age of 110. While their scribes make this claim, other records reveal that most died at a much earlier age. Apparently, the scribes were not trying to deceive their readers or falsify their records. It seems as though 110 years was considered a conventional way for Egyptians to say that the pharaohs had an ideal life, and accomplished all they set out to do.^{xii}
- ii. Like Jacob, he wanted to be buried in Canaan. He asked his family to carry his bones out of Egypt one day. Joseph anticipated the fulfillment of all God’s promises and died in hope.
- iii. Joseph assured his family that, although he would not be there to provide for them or to participate in their return to Canaan, “God would surely come to their aid” (50:24). These powerful words at the end of Genesis close the book with the same theme with which it began: God’s promise of deliverance (Genesis 3:15).
- iv. Joseph was embalmed and placed in a coffin. Bill Arnold concludes, “Joseph was summarily stuffed away in a box and preserved for a greater day. His bones in the coffin would be a constant reminder to the Israelites that Egypt was not their home. And some great day, the time of deliverance would dawn in the work of one especially prepared for that event, Moses. In the meantime, Joseph’s faith would serve as an example of how the Israelites were to live in a foreign land.”^{xiii}

Summary Statement: Jacob and Joseph died exhibiting faith in God’s promises.

Principle: *Mature believers are full of faith.*

Hebrews 11 says that, like Abraham, Jacob “made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country... For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God... [He was] still living by faith when [he] died. [He] did not receive the things promised; [he] only saw them and welcomed them from a distance,” admitting that he was a foreigner and stranger on earth. “People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them... By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. By faith, Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones” (Hebrews 11:8-16, 21-22).

Faith is believing God enough to act upon it. Jacob never had a permanent home on earth. He wandered from Canaan to Paddan Aram and from Canaan to Egypt, all the while convinced that Canaan would one day be a permanent home for his descendants. Joseph lived his entire adult life in Egypt and died there, apparently knowing that his descendants would not be free to leave Egypt anytime soon. Yet the final requests of Jacob and Joseph were for their burials to be in Canaan. They believed God would keep His promises and give Canaan to their descendants, even though they never saw that promise fulfilled in their lifetimes. God would “come to their aid”! That was their confidence.

Application: Are you fully confident that “God will come to your aid”? Is your habit one of immediately filtering life’s circumstances through faith in God and His promises or are you more likely to worry first and consider God’s promises later? If we do not learn to exercise *faith*, we are likely to end our lives in *fear*.

If Jacob and Joseph had had their eyes on their circumstances at the time of their deaths, they could easily have allowed fear to grow within them, fear that they and their descendants would never leave Egypt, would never inherit Canaan as God promised. They could have decided their lives had been lived in vain hope. They could have withdrawn into depression and died defeated. Instead, they died triumphantly, because they were men of faith.

What kind of a person will you become, as you grow older? A man or woman of fear or a man or woman of faith? Do you merely *intend* to be a faith-filled person, or are you currently *walking* that path, exercising faith in your present circumstances?

Conclusion

The Patriarchs modeled mature faith and a strong finish for us. Wouldn't you like to have that as your legacy as well? Whether you are twenty years old or ninety years old, it is never too late to begin establishing habits that will enable you to remain on course, right to the end of your life: following the Lord wherever He leads you, constantly in awe of Him, focused on blessing others, and full of faith.

ⁱAndy Stanley.

<http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/search?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=Stanley%2C+direction+not+intention+det+ermines+your+destination&commit=Search>

ⁱⁱ Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 239). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 836). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{iv} Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 851). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^vWalvoord, John F. ; Zuck, Roy B. ; Dallas Theological Seminary: *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*. Wheaton, IL : Victor Books, 1983-c1985, S. 1:98

^{vi} Kaiser, W. C., Jr., Davids, P. H., Bruce, F. F., & Brauch, M. T. (1996). *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 134). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity.

^{vii} Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 898). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{viii} Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 259). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^{ix} Mathews, K. A. (2005). *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (Vol. 1B, p. 899). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^x Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 260). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

^{xi}Kaiser, Walter C.: *Hard Sayings of the Bible*. Downers Grove, IL : InterVarsity, 1997, c1996, S. 136

^{xii} Youngblood, Ronald F. (1991). *The Book of Genesis* (p. 151). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House.

^{xiii} Arnold, Bill (1998). *Encountering the Book of Genesis* (p. 164). Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.