



Genesis

Catholic Scripture Study

Jacob Blesses His Sons: The End of an Era

History of the Early World	Patriarchs	Israel in Egypt	Conquest of Canaan	Judges	United Kingdom	Divided Kingdom Exile	Exile	Return	Maccabean Revolt	Jesus the Messiah	Church
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Introduction

The focus of our study has shifted away from Joseph, who has held center stage since chapter 39, to the family of Israel and its patriarch, Jacob. Strengthened by a final promise from God and looking forward to a reunion with his son, Jacob moved his growing family to the land of Goshen. They total 70 now, the number of completeness. This is the stock from which the nation of Israel will grow, nourished and prospering in this home-away-from-home. Jacob will set about two final tasks before he dies: obtaining a solemn promise from Joseph to bury him with his fathers, and giving his sons his final blessing. Apart from the blessing given to Joseph and his sons and Judah, the “blessings” read more like predictions of the sons’ respective fates. Much of the future history of the nation is reflected here. With chapter 50 comes the end of “the Beginning,” the end of the book of Genesis. What began with new life tragically altered by death, ends with the death of one who prefigures The One through whom will come renewed life. The record of the death of Joseph not only closes the era of the Patriarchs, it points forward to things yet to come. This final chapter shows Joseph’s strong faith that God will fulfill His promises. Half a century passes without mention as the embryonic nation grows in the womb of Egypt. The final words of the book, “and he was put in a coffin in Egypt,” may close the page on Joseph but they beckon us to look forward to the rest of the story. The book of Exodus begins with the news that as the Israelites multiplied and filled the land, a new king came to power and enslaved them and made their lives bitter. It is not too far-fetched to imagine that Joseph’s coffin, left waiting to be returned to the land of his fathers, stood as a constant reminder to Israel to have faith in a God who promises the impossible ...and does what He promises.

Read the following passage all the way through at least once before answering the questions on the text.

Genesis 47: 28-31

28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were a hundred and forty-seven years. 29 And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, “If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh, and promise to deal loyally and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, 30 but let me lie with my fathers; carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place.” He answered, “I will do as you have said.” 31 And he said, “Swear to me”; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.

Genesis 48

1 After this Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill"; so he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you"; then Israel summoned his strength, and sat up in bed. 3 And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful, and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.'



Genesis 48 (cont.)

5 And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. 6 And the offspring born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. 7 For when I came from Paddan, Rachel to my sorrow died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)." 8 When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" 9 Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, I pray you, that I may bless them." 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; and lo, God has let me see your children also." 12 Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. 14 And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it upon the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the first-born. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has led me all my life long to this day, 16 the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." 17 When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; and he took his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father; for this one is the first-born; put your right hand upon his head." 19 But his father refused, and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; nevertheless his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying, 'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh'; and thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope which I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow."



Questions on the Text

Israel Prepares to Die Read Genesis 47:28-31

1. We are not told why Jacob's family remained in Egypt after the famine, but vs. 28 says they are still there 17 years after arriving. Even so, Jacob KNOWS that his true home is with his fathers in Canaan. After getting Joseph to swear that he will take him out of Egypt to bury him in Canaan, the last sentence reads "Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed." What is he doing?

Israel Blesses Joseph Read Genesis 48

2. a. What is Jacob's first order of business on his deathbed? Explain what he tells Joseph in vss.1-7.
- b. Jacob refers to Ephraim before his older brother Manasseh (vss. 5,20) and deliberately crosses his hands so as to give Ephraim the greater blessing (vs. 14). Why did he do this? Do you see any irony here?



Questions on the Text (cont.)

Israel Blesses Joseph (cont.)

3. List all the names Jacob gives to God (or the ways he describes Him) in this chapter. What do these reveal about Jacob?
4. What is the essence of the blessing Jacob gives to Joseph through his sons?

Read Genesis 49 all the way through at least once, then answer the questions on the text that follow.

Genesis 49



1 Then Jacob called his sons, and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in days to come. 2 Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father. 3 Reuben, you are my first-born, my might, and the first fruits of my strength, pre-eminent in pride and pre-eminent in power. 4 Unstable as water, you shall not have pre-eminence because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it--you went up to my couch! 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 O my soul, come not into their council; O my spirit, be not joined to their company; for in their anger they slay men, and in their wantonness they hamstring oxen. 7 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. 8 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. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as a lioness; who dares rouse him up? 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. 11 Binding his foal to the vine and his ass's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes; 12 his eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. 13 Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. 14 Issachar is a strong ass, crouching between the sheepfolds; 15 he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a slave at forced labor. 16 Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 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. 18 I wait for thy salvation, O LORD. 19 Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. 20 Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties. 21 Naphtali is a hind let loose, that bears comely fawns. 22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers fiercely attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him sorely; 24 yet his bow remained unmoved, his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel), 25 by the God of your father who will help you, by God Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 26 The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers. 27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at even dividing the spoil." 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel; and this is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. 29 Then he charged 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, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Mach-pelah, 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. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah-- 32 the field and the cave that is in it were purchased from the Hittites." 33 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed, and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.



Questions on the Text

Israel Blesses His Sons Read Genesis 49

[To fully understand how Jacob's predictions are fulfilled requires a study of the rest of the Old Testament. Ultimately, the 12 tribes will bear the characteristics of their forebears even as the nation of Israel will bear the characteristics of her namesake. For further study you can read about the division of the Promised Land among the tribes in Josh. 13-21 or Eze. 47:13-48:35. Other passages are indicated below but they have been kept to a minimum for simplicity's sake; our aim is not to make an exhaustive study but to get the general gist of Jacob's blessing. (Note: Joseph will become two tribes under the names of his sons, and Levi is given no land and dispersed among all the tribes when they are given the priesthood, so the number of tribes remains constant at 12.)]

5. Jacob's words to his three oldest sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi, are more like curses than blessings. What will be their fates? (Read also Josh. 19:1,9 for Simeon's ultimate allotment of land, and Josh. 14:3-4 and Num. 35:2-3,6-8 for Levi's.)
6. What does Judah's blessing reveal about his tribe? In whom is this blessing fulfilled? (For help with this question, read Isa. 9:6-7; Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:6; and Rev. 5:5.)
7. Jacob's blessing of Joseph (vss. 22-26) includes several more names for God. What are they? Why might Jacob have wanted to use so many names in his blessing?
8. Note how many times "bless" or "blessing" is mentioned in just vss. 25 and 26. What is the effect of this repetition?
9. With what charge does Jacob conclude his blessing? What underlies his concern?

Read Genesis 50 all the way through at least once. Then answer the questions on the text that follow.



Genesis 50

1 Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; 3 forty days were required for it, for so many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days. 4 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, speak, I pray you, in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, 5 My father made me swear, saying, 'I am about to die: in my tomb which I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.' Now therefore let me go up, I pray you, and bury my father; then I will return." 6 And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 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. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen; it was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named



Genesis 50 (cont.)

Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan. 12 Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them; 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field at Mach-pelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite, to possess as a burying place. 14 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. 15 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 which we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died, 17 'Say to Joseph, Forgive, I pray you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.' And now, we pray you, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him, and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Fear not, for am I in the place of God? 20 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. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he reassured them and comforted them. 22 So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's house; and Joseph lived a hundred and ten years. 23 And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were born upon Joseph's knees. 24 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 which he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph took an oath of the sons of Israel, saying, "God will visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 So Joseph died, being a hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.



Questions on the Text

Israel Buried

Read Genesis 50:1-14

10. How does the description of Jacob's burial highlight the greatness of Jacob?
11. It is tempting to breathe a sigh of relief at the close of Jacob's life that he at last is more Israel than Jacob. His life has seemed a monumental struggle, for one so blessed with Divine Promise, and Joseph's constancy provides a welcome change. It is curious that the family of Israel will forevermore call on the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—not Israel, and not Joseph. Why would the nation look to the God of Jacob as their refuge or help, as the Psalmist does so often (for example, see Ps. 46:7,11)? Why would we?
12. Think back over the events of Jacob's life. What does Jacob's story teach you about God?

Joseph Reassures His Brothers

Read Genesis 50:15-21

13. What was Joseph's brothers' main concern once their father was dead? Are you surprised? What can explain their fear?
14. What was Joseph's response to this belated apology? How do you account for the difference between Joseph's attitude and that of his brothers?



Questions on the Text (cont.)

Joseph Dies

Read Genesis 50:22-26

15. More than 50 years have passed since Jacob died, during which time two more generations were born and the families of Israel continued to prosper in Egypt. In all that time, did Joseph forget God's promise? How do you know?
16. Read Heb. 11:22. Out of all that could be said of Joseph's life, what does the author of Hebrews record as proof of his faith? Explain why this is faith.
17. Go back and compare Jacob's last words in Gen. 48:21 with Joseph's in Gen. 50:24. What words does Joseph repeat almost verbatim? What does that little phrase, "but God," lend to his message? What does it say to you when hope is lost or dying?



Questions for Reflection

One of the best ways to meditate on God's Word is to take it deeply into your life through memorization. The suggested memory verse is always highlighted in the text in the lesson (see Gen. 50 for the highlighted text in this lesson) or you may choose one of your own. For further reflection, consider these questions:

1. In the midst of his blessings, Jacob paused to say "I wait for thy salvation, O LORD." Did he see in the prophetic utterances he made, a glimpse of the salvation that God was bringing about? Hebrews 11 tells us that he was speaking in faith, while bowing in worship. The essence of that faith was a certain hope that God would fulfill His promises, even if the fulfillment would not come for a long time. It is the same faith that Joseph had when he died, that God would bring his people again to Canaan. Do you have trouble waiting for God? Pray that God will increase your faith, and look for strength to the example of the heroes of faith we have read about in Genesis.
2. As we saw in this lesson, one of the legacies the Patriarchs passed on the people of Israel was a knowledge of God contained in His names. What names do you use for God? Have you thought of what they might mean? Is there any way you can use those names to pass on a legacy of what God has been to you, to your children and those around you?
3. In Christ, we are not only recipients of blessing, we—like him—are bestowers of blessing. It is our privilege and prerogative to bless every person we meet and every situation we are part of. How has God blessed you? Remember that you carry that gift, when you go into situations where pain and need and turmoil rule, and ask God for the wisdom and power you need to share it.



Opportunities for Additional Study

Points to Ponder

We've paid a good deal of attention to the initiative God took to call Abraham and use him to father a people for Himself, and we've looked at the Covenant promises God made and the seeds planted for their fulfillment. But what ultimate good is a land? What good are nationhood and dynasty and blessing, when there is no change in the people? In what way will making Israel a great nation, even one with the advantage of knowing God's law (which God will give them through Moses), do anything about the grip that sin and death have had on mankind since the fall of Adam?

That is a question worth pondering. God established formal covenant relationships with Noah, with Abraham and his family, with Moses and the nation of Israel, and with David and his kingdom. Each time God made great promises, and each time His people sinned and broke the covenant and brought down upon themselves covenant curses. Possessing the promise of God's fatherhood and blessing—even possessing God's law itself to guide them—held up the hope of salvation and showed what was required and yet it did nothing to enable men to keep that law. Human nature remained what it was since Adam's sin: fallen, and incapable of pleasing God.

To break the cycle and make a new, effective and lasting covenant, God became a man. He took on himself the covenant curses and by his death and resurrection broke the power of sin and death. He took on human nature so that He could die, then offered to all who would die and be raised with Him, His own nature so they could be made righteous.

The New Covenant in which we live is not a different covenant but a fulfillment of the Old. God still is a Father who makes and keeps promises and who is building His family by covenant. The New Covenant is all the promises of the Old, wrapped up in one and sealed by the sacrament of Christ's death and resurrection. In it God promises:

1. To restore creation: not just turn back the clock to Genesis 2 but to replace the old with new life, His own life, a life that is greater than anything we could have hoped for without the Fall.
2. To defeat Satan, the Serpent who started the whole problem in Eden;
3. To save us from sin, as He saved Noah from the wickedness of the world before the flood;
4. To give us not just a homeland on earth but an eternal home in heaven;
5. To make us not a powerful earthly kingdom but a kingdom of priests, a royal nation that will encompass the whole world and be a blessing to all nations.

Best of all—these are not only promised, they are offered together with the power we need to keep our part of the covenant, which is to love God with all our hearts and love our neighbor as ourselves; to be holy as He is holy. Only the divine nature flowing through us can accomplish that.

As John Paul II has written,

“Through the Incarnation God gave human life the dimension that He intended man to have from his first beginning; he has granted that dimension definitively—in the way that is peculiar to Him alone, in keeping with His eternal love and mercy, with the full freedom of God—and He has granted it also with the bounty that enables us, in considering the original sin and the whole history of the sins of humanity, and in considering the errors of the human intellect, will and heart, to repeat with amazement the words of the sacred liturgy: ‘O happy fault...which gained us so great a Redeemer!’ ” (Redemptor Hominis, 4)



Catholic Scripture Study



Opportunities for Additional Study (cont.)

Catechism Connection

Excerpted from The Catechism of the Catholic Church:

Gen. 45:8—“In time we can discover that God in his almighty providence can bring a good from the consequences of an evil, even a moral evil, caused by his creatures; ‘It was not you,’ said Joseph to his brother, ‘who sent me here, but God . . . You meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive.’ From the greatest moral evil ever committed—the rejection and murder of God’s only Son, caused by the sins of all men—God, by his grace that ‘abounded all the more,’ brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good.” (312)

The section in the Catechism on the verse in the Lord’s prayer, “And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us” (#2838-2845), is highly recommended to those who want to learn more about the Church’s teaching on forgiveness and reconciliation.



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Summary

In this lesson, we observed that:

1. In preparing to die, Jacob turns his thoughts toward God and worships. His final words of blessing are filled with faith that God will do as He has said.
2. In passing on the blessing and birthright, Jacob bypasses his older sons in favor of Joseph and his sons, and in particular the younger Ephraim. Jacob's name will be perpetuated in him, as can be seen generations later when Israel is often referred to as Ephraim.
3. The names Jacob uses for God reveal that he knows God personally and they testify to God's faithful care and guidance. Jacob looks back over his life in thanks and what he sees of God enables him to look forward in hope and assure his sons that God will be faithful to them as well.
4. Jacob's final words to his other sons show that the tribes that bear their names will bear their natures and fortunes as well. History bears out his predictions, as can be seen in the OT accounts of the nation of Israel.
5. Jacob assigns royal leadership among the tribes to Judah. His words point forward to the Messiah who will come from that tribe to rule an everlasting kingdom and who later will be called "Lion of the Tribe of Judah."
6. Jacob's final request to be buried in Canaan reveals that his heart lies at home with his fathers and shows his faith that God will one day bring his family out of Egypt.
7. Joseph's last words echo those of Jacob: although he is about to die, the others can be assured that God will take them home.
8. Genesis concludes with a forward look in hope for God's salvation, even as it begins with the cause of man's fall and the need for that salvation.

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