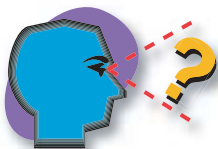




# Genesis

## Responses to the Questions



NOTE; BE SURE TO ANSWER ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THE ANSWERS IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY.

### Israel Prepares to Die

#### Read Genesis 47:28-31

1. Jacob is ending his life in worship, turning his thoughts toward God and His promises. He has faith, even though he can't see the outcome, that God will carry out His plan—which includes bringing back to Canaan not just the person of Israel but also the nation that will bear his name.

### Israel Blesses Joseph

#### Read Genesis 48

2. a. It is time for Jacob to pass on the blessing and the birthright. His words in chapter 49 will make it clear that Reuben, Simeon and Levi have forfeited their right to the position. Judah, next in line in age, will be blessed but only secondarily to Joseph, the first-born son of Jacob's beloved wife Rachel.

Now Jacob reminds Joseph of the Covenant promise he received from God, and blesses him through his sons with the double blessing normally reserved for the first-born. He takes the sons on his knees and adopts them as his own, seemingly to replace any sons Rebekah might have had, had she lived longer. Any future sons of Joseph would be counted under Ephraim and Manasseh in their inheritance.

b. Unlike Isaac, who confused Jacob and Esau in his blindness, Jacob does not mistake whom the blessing will go to. Heb. 11:21 tells us that Jacob blessed the sons of Joseph "by faith." God has obviously told him that Ephraim will be blessed over his brother Manasseh although both will be great. [As it happened, Ephraim would become the leading tribe for at least three centuries, and during the divided Kingdom would be the most powerful tribe in the North. Because of this, "Ephraim" often was used to refer to the Northern Kingdom as a whole (cf Hos. 5; 11:12).]

Even though Isaac was tricked into blessing the younger son and Jacob acted purposefully to do the same thing, God's purpose was worked out in both situations, within the context of man's freedom.

3. Jacob calls the Lord "God Almighty" (vs. 3; Heb. El Shaddai); "the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked (vs. 15); "the God who has led me all my life long to this day" (vs. 15; lit. "has been my shepherd"); and "the angel who has redeemed me from all evil (vs. 16; a reminder of the wrestler at Peniel).

These names show that Jacob knows the God of whom he speaks. God is not "God Almighty" simply because He told the Patriarchs that was His name; He has actually been "God Almighty" to Jacob. The three-fold description that Jacob uses in his blessing looks back to God's relationship with his fathers, then testifies to God's faithful care and guidance and redemption throughout his own life. Jacob's blessing is not idle. He knows through His own experience that God is faithful. He looks back in thanks to God, and so gains the assurance he needs to look forward in faith and hope to God's blessing on his family. It also enables him to say in all certainty, "I am about to die, but God will be with you, and will bring you again to the land of your fathers (vs. 21)."



## Responses to the Questions **ont** Catholic Scripture Study

### Israel Blesses Joseph (cont.)

4. In essence, it is the blessing of God's Covenant promise. The names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob will be perpetuated through Joseph's descendants, who through Ephraim and Manasseh will be great and grow into a multitude of nations. They will possess the land that God has promised as an everlasting possession. In earnest of this, Jacob gives Joseph the land that he owns in Shechem. History bears out the details: Manasseh's allotment of land will include Jacob's plot of land, and when the Davidic kingdom is divided into Judah and Israel, Israel (the Northern Kingdom) is often called Ephraim: thus Jacob's name (Israel) is lived on through his grandson.

### Israel Blesses His Sons

#### Read Genesis 49

5. Reuben will lose the pre-eminence due to him naturally as the first-born, because he slept with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen. 35:22). This was tantamount to an attempt to claim his father's authority and position for himself. His descendants will be characterized by indecision.

Simeon and Levi are cursed for their violence (remember their behavior at Shechem in Gen. 34). They will be divided and scattered: Simeon eventually was absorbed into Judah and Levi was dispersed among the other tribes as priests. They received no tribal allotment, but were given 48 cities from other tribes, which ensured the even dispersal of the leaders of worship [Note: there is no mention of the priestly character of Levi until Deut. 33:8-11.]

It is a kind of poetic justice that when six of the 48 cities were designated as cities of refuge, Shechem was included among them.

6. Jacob's blessing of Judah announces that his tribe will rule over those of his brothers. It will be settled and prosperous and strong. The picture of the lion cub suggests sovereignty, strength and courage. Most important, the image of the scepter points to a universal king who will come from Judah and reign "until he comes to whom it belongs."

The initial fulfillment of this prophecy is found in the kingdom and dynasty God establishes in David. "He ... to whom it belongs" was traditionally believed by the Jews to point to the Messiah. The verses from Isaiah and Micah, among others, flesh out this picture and point to the eternal ruler on David's throne coming from Bethlehem, a town in Judah. Christians, of course, identify this figure as Jesus Christ, the child born in Bethlehem and the "Lion of the tribe of Judah," the "lamb slain" who comes to reign in righteousness and justice on David's throne forever.

[Note: I Chron. 5:2 regards the birthright as Joseph's, and Jacob's special blessing on Joseph and his sons supports that. But if Joseph thus received the double blessing and inheritance (and through his sons was made steward of the promise) and acts as tribal head during his lifetime, it appears that Jacob assigns royal leadership among the tribes to Judah. This ambiguity may point ahead to the divided kingdom, which will be ruled by Ephraim in the North and by Judah in the South.]

7. Jacob calls God by five names: "the mighty One of Jacob;" "the Shepherd;" "the Rock of Israel;" "the God of your father who will help you;" and "God Almighty who will bless you." In those names lie a full revelation of who God is and who He has been to His people. Jacob seems to be saying to Joseph, this is who our God is. He will be the same with you as he was for your fathers; He will bless you and fulfill His promise. God has been progressively revealing Himself and Jacob is passing down not only His promises and blessings but an accumulation of revealed Truth about God, summarized in His names.



## Responses to the Questions **ont** Catholic Scripture Study

### Israel Blesses His Sons (cont.)

8. Jacob's repetition of "bless" and "blessing" (six times in those two verses) imparts a deep sense of God's blessing. The passage gives the effect of richness, of blessing "pressed down, shaken together and running over (Luke 6:38)."

This is a good place to feel what God's blessing is like. We first read about blessing in Gen. 1-2 when God created the earth and bestowed His goodness on it by blessing all He created. "The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it," wrote Solomon in Prov. 10:22. Here we see that blessing concentrated and poured down upon one of God's chosen ones, and a descendant of his will pour that blessing out upon the world. God is not stingy with His blessing nor does He offer it selectively; this is a beautiful picture of the blessing He longs to pour on all His children and with which he will bless all who call on Him (see Rom. 10:12).

9. Jacob ends by charging his sons to bury him in Canaan, in the field of Machpelah, with Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah. He does not want to remain in Egypt; his home is in the land God has promised them. That field that Abraham bought is the first land they owned in Canaan. It is in a sense a pledge of their inheritance.

Jacob is about to die and doesn't want his children to forget who they are or where they belong. The land of Canaan is a tangible representation of all God's promise to them, for without it they cannot be a nation. His sons have been blessed and made rich in Egypt and Jacob doesn't want them to dig in too deeply, but to keep their eyes on their future inheritance.

### Israel Buried Read Genesis 50:1-14

10. The prescribed number of days of mourning for a Pharaoh was 72. That the Egyptians spent 70 days in mourning for someone of a "detestable" class of shepherds and not of their people surely says something about their regard for him. The great company sent by Pharaoh to Canaan to pay their respect, and the reaction of the Canaanites, also suggest that Jacob was highly esteemed in Egypt.

11. God is not just the God of the one who struggled with Him and prevailed; He is also the God of the one who schemed his way into the blessing, and struggled with Laban, and allowed his wives to keep their household gods, and who raised sons both wicked and righteous. The people who bear the name Israel are as inconstant as Jacob and as triumphant as Israel. Whether or not the name "Jacob" was intentionally chosen over "Israel" (in "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob"), it seems fitting in that God is not the God of those already made perfect but of those who long to be His (and who, under the New Covenant, are given His righteousness that we might be made perfect). He is our help in spite of our sins and fearful faltering. God's people are not loved because they are worthy; they are worth much because of His transforming love. This truth is proclaimed every time someone calls on the God of Jacob.

12. If you are doing this study in a group, take time if you can to review the major events in Jacob's life. Answers will vary, but should include some of the following:

Men like Abraham and Joseph can look like spiritual giants whose lives we can only hope to model; Jacob is more like most of us, an ordinary man with ordinary failings. That God chose him over Esau (who was the first-born and who in some respects appears more "worthy") to father his people shows that God chooses who He wants to choose and He is not limited by our ideas of worth. His choice is gratuitous, and any worth we have is based on Him.



## Responses to the Questions **ont** Catholic Scripture Study

### Israel Buried (cont.)

The way God went before Jacob and prepared for him to meet and marry Rachel shows His interest in the details of our lives. It also shows the way His will and omnipotence intersects with our free will and actions.

God went with Jacob wherever he went, even to Haran and to Egypt. God never forsook Jacob, and He will never forsake those who belong to Him.

God's untiring love, His constant presence and guidance, and the way He patiently accomplishes His plan through discipline and life's circumstances are all abundantly evident in the life of Jacob.

### Joseph Reassures His Brothers Read Genesis 50:15-21

13. Sadly, Joseph's brothers' first thought when their father died was that Joseph would now take his chance for revenge. (Remember that Esau, out of respect for his father, planned to kill Jacob once Isaac was dead.)

Given Judah's change of heart it may be surprising of him, but it should not come as a shock because none of the brothers have apologized to Joseph directly. Even now their plea for forgiveness is motivated by fear and couched in terms of their father's request.

We are not told why they suspect Joseph of harboring plans of vengeance; perhaps it is because they would hold the grudge themselves. In that respect, their reaction reveals their own nature. But there is another possibility as well: If they have never truly forgiven Joseph for the things that drove them to sell him in the first place (being the favorite, getting the coat, telling his dreams, and informing on them), they may not be sorry they treated him as they did. Recognizing you have done wrong and deserve punishment does not mean you repent of the deed. And the heart that cannot forgive another, cannot receive forgiveness in return. This is why Jesus says in Matt. 6:15, "But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." Such a heart is too hard to receive mercy—and their assumption that Joseph will make them his slaves shows that they do not expect mercy. In the words of the Catechism, "...this outpouring of mercy cannot penetrate our hearts as long as we have not forgiven those who have trespassed against us....In refusing to forgive our brothers and sisters, our hearts are closed and their hardness makes them impervious to the Father's merciful love; but in confessing our sins, our hearts are opened to his grace (2840)."

14. Joseph weeps at their hard hearts and their fear. Nonetheless he offers them tender reassurance, forgiveness and comfort. He shows no trace of bitterness or spite and seems astonished that they think he would punish them. "Am I in God's place?" he asks.

Joseph, because he knows and trusts and fears God, is able to look beyond his brothers' sins and see that God transformed the injustice into good. The brothers have a human, selfish perspective and are filled with guilt that doesn't allow them to look to God.



## Responses to the Questions *ont*

## Catholic Scripture Study

### Joseph Dies

#### Read Genesis 50:22-26

15. Joseph never forgot God's promise. His last words on his deathbed reveal his conviction that God will bring the others out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

16. In his dying words, Joseph spoke of the Exodus and instructed his brothers to bury him in Canaan, their promised home. St. Paul says that he did this "by faith." Faith was necessary because he was looking forward in hope, confident of something that could not be seen, the fulfillment of God's covenant with his family. It is faith that enables us to believe God's promises even though circumstances or physical evidence is against them. Faith believes things that can't be seen and acts as though they can, because those things are founded on God.

17. Joseph says "I am about to die; but God will visit you, and bring you up out of this land." "I am about to die" signals the end of an era. Knowing that, the others may fear that with Joseph gone, God's favor will end. "But God" interjects hope. Those small words speak of the strength and power and wisdom of God: not just of His ability to change things and put them right but His penchant for standing things on their heads, for acting through the underdog, for winning when all the human odds are against something happening. To Joseph's brothers they were a reminder that God is not just the God of their fathers and Joseph but of them as well. As He cared for the Patriarchs, He will care for them. God will not abandon them or forget His promise just because Joseph is gone.

Whenever things are at their worst, these are good words to pull out and ponder. "But God" puts the lie to any fears that follow bad news. God is the God of the impossible; He comes to our rescue; He is faithful and always present; we are never without hope when we belong to God.