

GENESIS
DAILY SCRIPTURE READING GUIDE
Part III: Chapters 37-50
The Account of Joseph Jacobson
or
Which Son Will Take His Father's Place?



To my fellow readers of Genesis,

The Israelites called the first five books of their Bibles “Torah,” which means teaching. And the first book of the Torah—the book we call Genesis—has a lot to teach us about the world and who made it and why and what we’ve done with the place.

In Part 1, we read Genesis chapters 1-11, which are a prologue not only to the rest of the book, but to the entire Bible. It begins with Creation and ends with the Tower of Babel, recounting humanity’s slide into dark rebellion.

In Part 2, we read Genesis chapters 12-36, which recount the history of the patriarchs of Israel: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Genesis Part 2 begins to tell of God’s plan to rescue humanity and restore Eden. It is the story of the formation of the family that will carry on the covenant promise—in fact, it’s all about family, which is why I also like to say Family is How We Fight.

This Daily Reading Guide covers what I am calling Genesis Part 3. I believe these final chapters—37-50—give us what I believe is not just one of the greatest stories in the Bible, but one of the greatest stories in all of human history, the story of Jacob’s brilliant 11th son, Joseph. As we shall see, Genesis Part 3 is an absolute masterpiece of theological story-telling, and its final sentence will take your breath away.

The question that Genesis Part 3 is concerned with is this one:

Which son will lead the family after Jacob is gone?

The answer will surprise you.

How to Read the Bible:

Start with the assumption that every word matters and that no detail is insignificant or extraneous. In this reader, I’ve portioned out readings for weekdays only, in what I hope is a manageable schedule. I strongly recommend forming the habit of The First15, i.e., spending the first 15 minutes of each day in silence, prayer, and scripture.

Consistency is more important than intensity.

So:

If you miss today, don't miss tomorrow.

I've written brief commentary to go with each day's reading in an attempt to help you understand and appreciate what you read. If my commentary is helpful to that end, great. If it isn't, skip it and just focus on the words of the scripture instead!

Let's go.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Andrew Forrest". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first letters of "Andrew" and "Forrest" being capitalized and prominent.

✝ Andrew Forrest
Asbury Church
September 2022

P.S. Want to receive these daily readings and commentary each weekday morning in your inbox? Sign up on my website: www.andrewforrest.org.

MORNING PRAYER ORDER FOR GROUPS & MEETINGS

Have a group or class that meets in the morning?
Feel free to use the order below to provide some structure.

1. GREETING

This is the day that the Lord has made!

Let us rejoice and be glad in it.

Psalm 118:24

2. THE INVITATORY

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

O God, make speed to save us;

O Lord, make haste to help us;

Glorify be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit:

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

3. OPENING PRAYER

Let us pray: Almighty God, to you all hearts are open, all desires known, and from you, no secrets are hidden. Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

4. SCRIPTURE LESSON

The day's scripture is read and briefly expounded.

5. PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name;

Thy kingdom come, thy will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us.

And lead us not into temptation,

But deliver us from evil:

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory

For ever and ever. Amen

6. CLOSING PRAYER

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: you have brought us safely to the beginning of this day, and we ask that you drive far from

us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

7. CLOSING BLESSING:

The Lord bless you and keep you;
The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you;
The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon you and give you peace;
And now may the blessing of God Almighty,
The Father the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
Be with us and remain with us now and forever. Amen.

OCCASIONAL PRAYERS

I have included below some occasional prayers that you may find helpful. Often at a birth or a death I find myself fumbling for the right words to say, and these occasional prayers have been a help to me. (I'd suggest copying to your phone the ones that seem most useful to you, so you can easily text them to others when the need arises.)

A GRACE BEFORE MEALS

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen.

or

Blessed are you, O Lord God, King of the Universe, for you give us food to sustain our lives and make our hearts glad; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

EVENING PRAYER

O God, the life of all who live, the light of the faithful, the strength of those who labor, and the repose of the dead: We thank you for the blessings of the day that is past, and humbly ask for your protection through the coming night and so thereby bring us in safety to the morning hours. Keep watch, dear Lord, with those who work, or watch, or weep this night, and give your angels charge over those who sleep. Tend the sick, Lord Christ; give rest to the weary, bless the dying, soothe the suffering, pity the afflicted, shield the joyous; and all this we pray in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

FOR JOY IN GOD'S CREATION

O heavenly Father, you have filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works; that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR OUR NATION

Almighty God, who hast given us this good land for our heritage: We humbly beseech thee that we may always prove ourselves a people mindful of thy favor and glad to do thy will. Bless our land with honorable industry, sound learning, and pure conduct. Save us from violence, discord, and confusion; from pride and arrogance, and from every evil way. Defend our liberties, and fashion into one united people the multitudes brought hither out of many kindreds and tongues. Endue with the spirit of wisdom those to whom, in thy Name, we entrust the authority of government, that there may be justice and peace at home, and that, through obedience to thy law, we may show forth thy praise among the nations of the earth. In the time of prosperity, fill our hearts with thankfulness, and in the day of trouble, suffer not our trust in thee to fail; all of which we ask through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A BIRTHDAY

O God, our times are in your hand: Look with favor, we pray, on your servant *N.* as he begins another year. Grant that *he* may grow in wisdom and grace, and strengthen *his* trust in your goodness all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A CHILD, OR FOR A BIRTHDAY

Watch over your child *N.*, O Lord, as *his* days increase; bless *him* and guide *him*, and keep *him* unspotted from the world. Strengthen *him* when *he* stands; comfort *him* when discouraged or sorrowful; raise *him* up if *he* falls; and in *his* heart may your peace which passes understanding abide all the days of *his* life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR A MARRIAGE OR ANNIVERSARY

O God, you have so consecrated the covenant of marriage that in it is represented the spiritual unity between Christ and his Church: Send your blessing upon these your servants [as they begin another year], that they may so love, honor, and cherish each other in faithfulness and patience, in wisdom and true godliness, that their home may be a haven of blessing and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.

ON SUNDAYS

O God, you make us glad with the weekly remembrance of the glorious resurrection of your Son our Lord: Give us this day such blessing through our worship of you, that the week to come may be spent in your favor; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

A THANKSGIVING PRAYER

Accept, O Lord, our thanks and praise for all that you have done for us. We thank you for the splendor of the whole creation, for the beauty of this world, for the wonder of life, and for the mystery of love. We thank you for the blessing of family and friends, and for the loving care which surrounds us on every side. We thank you for setting us at tasks that demand our best efforts, and for leading us to accomplishments that satisfy and delight us. We thank you also for those disappointments and failures that lead us to acknowledge our dependence on you alone. Above all, we thank you for your Son Jesus Christ; for the truth of his Word and the example of his life; for his steadfast obedience, by which he overcame temptation; for his dying, through which he conquered death; and for his rising to life again, in which we are raised to the life of your kingdom. Grant us the gift of your Spirit, that we may know Christ and make him known; and through him, at all times and in all places, may give thanks to you in all things. Amen.

FOR THE BEAUTY OF THE EARTH

We give you thanks, most gracious God, for the beauty of earth and sky and sea; for the richness of mountains, plains, and rivers; for the wonder of your creatures, large and small; and for all the loveliness that surrounds us. We praise you for these good gifts, and pray that we may safeguard them for our posterity. Grant that we may continue to grow in our grateful enjoyment of your abundant creation, to the honor and glory of your Name, now and for ever. Amen.

FOR OUR ENEMIES

O God, the Creator of all, whose Son commanded us to love our enemies: Lead them and us from prejudice to truth; deliver them and us from hatred, cruelty, and revenge; and in your good time enable us all to stand reconciled before you in Jesus Christ; in whose Name we pray. Amen.

FOR THE RECOVERY OF A SICK PERSON

O God, the strength of the weak and the comfort of sufferers: Mercifully accept our prayers, and grant to your servant N. the help of your power, that his sickness may be turned into health, and our sorrow into joy; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

AT THE TIME OF DEATH

Rest eternal grant to N., O Lord; and may *his* soul, and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace and in the sure and certain hope of the Resurrection. Amen.

FOR DESIRING GOD

O God, grant that we may desire you, and desiring you seek you, and seeking you find you, and finding you be satisfied in you forever. Amen.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 24
GENESIS 37:1-11

JOSEPH'S DREAMS

37 Jacob lived in the land of his father's sojournings, in the land of Canaan.

² These are the generations of Jacob.

Joseph, being seventeen years old, was pasturing the flock with his brothers. He was a boy with the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah, his father's wives. And Joseph brought a bad report of them to their father. ³ Now Israel loved Joseph more than any other of his sons, because he was the son of his old age. And he made him a robe of many colors. ⁴ But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peacefully to him.

⁵ Now Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers they hated him even more. ⁶ He said to them, "Hear this dream that I have dreamed: ⁷ Behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and behold, my sheaf arose and stood upright. And behold, your sheaves gathered around it and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸ His brothers said to him, "Are you indeed to reign over us? Or are you indeed to rule over us?" So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.

⁹ Then he dreamed another dream and told it to his brothers and said, "Behold, I have dreamed another dream. Behold, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me." ¹⁰ But when he told it to his father and to his brothers, his father rebuked him and said to him, "What is this dream that you have dreamed? Shall I and your mother and your brothers indeed come to bow ourselves to the ground before you?" ¹¹ And his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind.

Jacob has 12 sons; which son will be the next leader of the family?
Which son will take his father's place?

Genesis 12-36 is about the formation of a family that will pass on God's new way from generation to generation. God chooses Abraham, and then Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are taught what it will take to be the founders of this new way.

We now come to the third and final part of Genesis—chapters 37-50—which will be about the problem of passing on God’s new way when there are 12(!) sons that make up the next generation.

Right off, we assume it will be Joseph, the 11th son, who will lead the family when Jacob dies. Joseph is more gifted than his brothers, and Jacob has set him apart to be the future leader of his brothers. The coat Jacob gives Joseph (an obscure Hebrew term—”coat with long sleeves” or “coat of many colors”) is meant to mark him as Jacob’s heir.

As his dreams prove, Joseph is a boy of remarkable insight. But is he the right one to lead the family into the future?

Which son will lead the family when Jacob is gone?

We’ll have to read on to find out.

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 25

GENESIS 37:12-36

JOSEPH SOLD BY HIS BROTHERS

¹² Now his brothers went to pasture their father’s flock near Shechem. ¹³ And Israel said to Joseph, “Are not your brothers pasturing the flock at Shechem? Come, I will send you to them.” And he said to him, “Here I am.” ¹⁴ So he said to him, “Go now, see if it is well with your brothers and with the flock, and bring me word.” So he sent him from the Valley of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. ¹⁵ And a man found him wandering in the fields. And the man asked him, “What are you seeking?” ¹⁶ “I am seeking my brothers,” he said. “Tell me, please, where they are pasturing the flock.” ¹⁷ And the man said, “They have gone away, for I heard them say, ‘Let us go to Dothan.’” So Joseph went after his brothers and found them at Dothan.

¹⁸ They saw him from afar, and before he came near to them they conspired against him to kill him. ¹⁹ They said to one another, “Here comes this dreamer. ²⁰ Come now, let us kill him and throw him into one of the pits. Then we will say that a fierce animal has devoured him, and we will see what will become of his dreams.” ²¹ But when Reuben heard it, he rescued him out of their hands, saying, “Let us not take his life.” ²² And Reuben said to them, “Shed no blood; throw him into this pit here in the wilderness, but do not lay a hand on him”—that he might rescue him out of their hand to restore him to

his father. ²³ So when Joseph came to his brothers, they stripped him of his robe, the robe of many colors that he wore. ²⁴ And they took him and threw him into a pit. The pit was empty; there was no water in it.

²⁵ Then they sat down to eat. And looking up they saw a caravan of Ishmaelites coming from Gilead, with their camels bearing gum, balm, and myrrh, on their way to carry it down to Egypt. ²⁶ Then Judah said to his brothers, "What profit is it if we kill our brother and conceal his blood? ²⁷ Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites, and let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our own flesh." And his brothers listened to him. ²⁸ Then Midianite traders passed by. And they drew Joseph up and lifted him out of the pit, and sold him to the Ishmaelites for twenty shekels of silver. They took Joseph to Egypt.

²⁹ When Reuben returned to the pit and saw that Joseph was not in the pit, he tore his clothes ³⁰ and returned to his brothers and said, "The boy is gone, and I, where shall I go?" ³¹ Then they took Joseph's robe and slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood. ³² And they sent the robe of many colors and brought it to their father and said, "This we have found; please identify whether it is your son's robe or not." ³³ And he identified it and said, "It is my son's robe. A fierce animal has devoured him. Joseph is without doubt torn to pieces." ³⁴ Then Jacob tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵ All his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted and said, "No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning." Thus his father wept for him. ³⁶ Meanwhile the Midianites had sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard.

It's worth slowing down and really trying to see the story as it unfolds.

Imagine the terror Joseph feels when his brothers strip him of his prized robe and violently throw him into the pit.

Imagine what it is like to be kept there under the merciless sun while your brothers decide how to dispose of you.

Imagine the screaming helplessness he feels as the Midianite slavers take him captive.

Imagine the brothers slaughtering a goat and rinsing Joseph's prized robe in animal blood.

And imagine Jacob receiving the news and seeing the brown spots on the torn robe.

P.S. Pay attention to who does or says what in the story, particularly to Reuben and Judah. These details will matter a great deal later in the story. Remember, the question is: Which brother will lead the family after their father Jacob's death?

P.P.S. "Sheol" [v. 35] is the Hebrew term for the place of the dead; a good approximation of the term would be "underworld."

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 26 **GENESIS 38:1-30**

JUDAH AND TAMAR

38 It happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and turned aside to a certain Adullamite, whose name was Hirah.

² There Judah saw the daughter of a certain Canaanite whose name was Shua. He took her and went in to her, ³ and she conceived and bore a son, and he called his name Er. ⁴ She conceived again and bore a son, and she called his name Onan. ⁵ Yet again she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah. Judah was in Chezib when she bore him.

⁶ And Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.

⁷ But Er, Judah's firstborn, was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death. ⁸ Then Judah said to Onan, "Go in to your brother's wife and perform the duty of a brother-in-law to her, and raise up offspring for your brother." ⁹ But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his. So whenever he went in to his brother's wife he would waste the semen on the ground, so as not to give offspring to his brother. ¹⁰ And what he did was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and he put him to death also. ¹¹ Then Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Remain a widow in your father's house, till Shelah my son grows up"—for he feared that he would die, like his brothers. So Tamar went and remained in her father's house.

¹² In the course of time the wife of Judah, Shua's daughter, died. When Judah was comforted, he went up to Timnah to his sheepshearers, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite. ¹³ And when Tamar was told, "Your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep," ¹⁴ she took off her widow's garments and covered herself with a veil, wrapping herself up, and sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road

to Timnah. For she saw that Shelah was grown up, and she had not been given to him in marriage. ¹⁵ When Judah saw her, he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face. ¹⁶ He turned to her at the roadside and said, “Come, let me come in to you,” for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, “What will you give me, that you may come in to me?” ¹⁷ He answered, “I will send you a young goat from the flock.” And she said, “If you give me a pledge, until you send it—” ¹⁸ He said, “What pledge shall I give you?” She replied, “Your signet and your cord and your staff that is in your hand.” So he gave them to her and went in to her, and she conceived by him. ¹⁹ Then she arose and went away, and taking off her veil she put on the garments of her widowhood.

²⁰ When Judah sent the young goat by his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the woman's hand, he did not find her.

²¹ And he asked the men of the place, “Where is the cult prostitute who was at Enaim at the roadside?” And they said, “No cult prostitute has been here.” ²² So he returned to Judah and said, “I have not found her. Also, the men of the place said, ‘No cult prostitute has been here.’” ²³ And Judah replied, “Let her keep the things as her own, or we shall be laughed at. You see, I sent this young goat, and you did not find her.”

²⁴ About three months later Judah was told, “Tamar your daughter-in-law has been immoral. Moreover, she is pregnant by immorality.” And Judah said, “Bring her out, and let her be burned.” ²⁵ As she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law, “By the man to whom these belong, I am pregnant.” And she said, “Please identify whose these are, the signet and the cord and the staff.” ²⁶ Then Judah identified them and said, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not know her again.

²⁷ When the time of her labor came, there were twins in her womb.

²⁸ And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” ²⁹ But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” Therefore his name was called Perez. ³⁰ Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

As we’re following the story told in Genesis 37-50, we are watching to see how an important question will get answered:

Who will lead the family after Jacob is gone?

In Genesis 37, Joseph seems to be the leading candidate, since he is both his father's favorite and the most gifted. As the chapter closes, however, Joseph finds himself sold into Egyptian slavery—not a promising situation.

And then Genesis 38 seems to be a non sequitur—we want to follow Joseph's journey, and instead we're given—without any explanation—this strange story about Judah, the fourth of Jacob's twelve sons. Here's why:

We're shown something important about Judah that will help us understand if he should or should not be the leader after Jacob.

Reading along the story of Judah and his daughter-in-law Tamar so far, what do you think?

Is this how a man should behave?

P.S. After wrestling with the angel, Jacob limps for the rest of his life.

After Judah is humbled by Tamar, he may not have a literal limp, but I think his soul is marked going forward. In other words, he "limps."

This moral humbling will be important as the story of the sons of Israel unfolds.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 27 **GENESIS 39:1-6**

JOSEPH AND POTIPHAR'S WIFE

39 Now Joseph had been brought down to Egypt, and Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh, the captain of the guard, an Egyptian, had bought him from the Ishmaelites who had brought him down there. ² The Lord was with Joseph, and he became a successful man, and he was in the house of his Egyptian master. ³ His master saw that the Lord was with him and that the Lord caused all that he did to succeed in his hands. ⁴ So Joseph found favor in his sight and attended him, and he made him overseer of his house and put him in charge of all that he had. ⁵ From the time that he made him overseer in his house and over all that he had, the Lord blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's

sake; the blessing of the Lord was on all that he had, in house and field. ⁶ So he left all that he had in Joseph's charge, and because of him he had no concern about anything but the food he ate.

NEVER is a strong word and maybe overstates the case, but RARELY gets it just right.

The narrator in Genesis very very rarely comments on a character's situation; the narrator shows and rarely tells.

When Joseph is sold into Egyptian slavery, however, the narrator makes a point of telling us that the Lord is with him—5 times in 6 verses!

I think the narrator wants it to be as clear as possible that though Joseph's circumstances are difficult, that does NOT mean that the Lord is not with him in those circumstances.

What if the narrator of your life said the same thing about your circumstances? What if the Lord is DEFINITELY AND COMPLETELY WITH YOU TODAY?

Keep going.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 31

GENESIS 40:1-23

THE CUPBEARER AND THE BAKER

40 Some time after this, the cupbearer of the king of Egypt and his baker committed an offense against their lord the king of Egypt. ² And Pharaoh was angry with his two officers, the chief cupbearer and the chief baker, ³ and he put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the prison where Joseph was confined. ⁴ The captain of the guard appointed Joseph to be with them, and he attended them. They continued for some time in custody.

⁵ And one night they both dreamed—the cupbearer and the baker of the king of Egypt, who were confined in the prison—each his own dream, and each dream with its own interpretation.

⁶ When Joseph came to them in the morning, he saw that they were troubled. ⁷ So he asked Pharaoh's officers who were with him in custo-

dy in his master's house, "Why are your faces downcast today?"⁸ They said to him, "We have had dreams, and there is no one to interpret them." And Joseph said to them, "Do not interpretations belong to God? Please tell them to me."

⁹ So the chief cupbearer told his dream to Joseph and said to him, "In my dream there was a vine before me,¹⁰ and on the vine there were three branches. As soon as it budded, its blossoms shot forth, and the clusters ripened into grapes.¹¹ Pharaoh's cup was in my hand, and I took the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup and placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand."¹² Then Joseph said to him, "This is its interpretation: the three branches are three days.¹³ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head and restore you to your office, and you shall place Pharaoh's cup in his hand as formerly, when you were his cupbearer.¹⁴ Only remember me, when it is well with you, and please do me the kindness to mention me to Pharaoh, and so get me out of this house.¹⁵ For I was indeed stolen out of the land of the Hebrews, and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the pit."

¹⁶ When the chief baker saw that the interpretation was favorable, he said to Joseph, "I also had a dream: there were three cake baskets on my head,¹⁷ and in the uppermost basket there were all sorts of baked food for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating it out of the basket on my head."¹⁸ And Joseph answered and said, "This is its interpretation: the three baskets are three days.¹⁹ In three days Pharaoh will lift up your head—from you!—and hang you on a tree. And the birds will eat the flesh from you."

²⁰ On the third day, which was Pharaoh's birthday, he made a feast for all his servants and lifted up the head of the chief cupbearer and the head of the chief baker among his servants.²¹ He restored the chief cupbearer to his position, and he placed the cup in Pharaoh's hand.²² But he hanged the chief baker, as Joseph had interpreted to them.²³ Yet the chief cupbearer did not remember Joseph, but forgot him.

The reason these two men are such important officials to Pharaoh is because they are responsible for his food—if they were to poison Pharaoh, no one would be able to stop them.

It's surely not a coincidence that later Joseph will gain his position in Egypt because of his ability to provide food for Pharaoh and the people.

I also think it's interesting that the baker waits until he hears Joseph give a favorable interpretation to the cupbearer's dream before he's willing to tell Joseph his own dream. Of course, when the baker's own interpretation comes, it is not a good one!

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 1

GENESIS 41:1-40

PHARAOH'S DREAMS

4I After two whole years, Pharaoh dreamed that he was standing by the Nile, ² and behold, there came up out of the Nile seven cows, attractive and plump, and they fed in the reed grass. ³ And behold, seven other cows, ugly and thin, came up out of the Nile after them, and stood by the other cows on the bank of the Nile. ⁴ And the ugly, thin cows ate up the seven attractive, plump cows. And Pharaoh awoke. ⁵ And he fell asleep and dreamed a second time. And behold, seven ears of grain, plump and good, were growing on one stalk. ⁶ And behold, after them sprouted seven ears, thin and blighted by the east wind. ⁷ And the thin ears swallowed up the seven plump, full ears. And Pharaoh awoke, and behold, it was a dream. ⁸ So in the morning his spirit was troubled, and he sent and called for all the magicians of Egypt and all its wise men. Pharaoh told them his dreams, but there was none who could interpret them to Pharaoh.

⁹ Then the chief cupbearer said to Pharaoh, "I remember my offenses today. ¹⁰ When Pharaoh was angry with his servants and put me and the chief baker in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, ¹¹ we dreamed on the same night, he and I, each having a dream with its own interpretation. ¹² A young Hebrew was there with us, a servant of the captain of the guard. When we told him, he interpreted our dreams to us, giving an interpretation to each man according to his dream. ¹³ And as he interpreted to us, so it came about. I was restored to my office, and the baker was hanged."

¹⁴ Then Pharaoh sent and called Joseph, and they quickly brought him out of the pit. And when he had shaved himself and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh.

¹⁵ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I have had a dream, and there is no one who can interpret it. I have heard it said of you that when you hear a dream you can interpret it." ¹⁶ Joseph answered Pharaoh, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh a favorable answer." ¹⁷ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Behold, in my dream I was standing on the banks of

the Nile.¹⁸ Seven cows, plump and attractive, came up out of the Nile and fed in the reed grass.¹⁹ Seven other cows came up after them, poor and very ugly and thin, such as I had never seen in all the land of Egypt.²⁰ And the thin, ugly cows ate up the first seven plump cows,²¹ but when they had eaten them no one would have known that they had eaten them, for they were still as ugly as at the beginning. Then I awoke.²² I also saw in my dream seven ears growing on one stalk, full and good.²³ Seven ears, withered, thin, and blighted by the east wind, sprouted after them,²⁴ and the thin ears swallowed up the seven good ears. And I told it to the magicians, but there was no one who could explain it to me.”

²⁵ Then Joseph said to Pharaoh, “The dreams of Pharaoh are one; God has revealed to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁶ The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears are seven years; the dreams are one.²⁷ The seven lean and ugly cows that came up after them are seven years, and the seven empty ears blighted by the east wind are also seven years of famine.²⁸ It is as I told Pharaoh; God has shown to Pharaoh what he is about to do.²⁹ There will come seven years of great plenty throughout all the land of Egypt,³⁰ but after them there will arise seven years of famine, and all the plenty will be forgotten in the land of Egypt. The famine will consume the land,³¹ and the plenty will be unknown in the land by reason of the famine that will follow, for it will be very severe.³² And the doubling of Pharaoh's dream means that the thing is fixed by God, and God will shortly bring it about.³³ Now therefore let Pharaoh select a discerning and wise man, and set him over the land of Egypt.³⁴ Let Pharaoh proceed to appoint overseers over the land and take one-fifth of the produce of the land of Egypt during the seven plentiful years.³⁵ And let them gather all the food of these good years that are coming and store up grain under the authority of Pharaoh for food in the cities, and let them keep it.³⁶ That food shall be a reserve for the land against the seven years of famine that are to occur in the land of Egypt, so that the land may not perish through the famine.”

JOSEPH RISES TO POWER

³⁷ This proposal pleased Pharaoh and all his servants.³⁸ And Pharaoh said to his servants, “Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?”³⁹ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are.⁴⁰ You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command. Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you.”

As the story of Joseph unfolds, we see him becoming more and more Egyptian even as he pulls farther and farther away from his family. It's significant that before he can come into Pharaoh's presence, Joseph has to shave and change his clothes: he's discarding his old identity as a son of Jacob and beginning to take on his new identity as an Egyptian.

Not only does Joseph understand Pharaoh's dreams, he understands how to use the dreams to his advantage:

"And now let Pharaoh look for a discerning and wise man and put him in charge of the land of Egypt." [Genesis 41:33]

Joseph knows exactly how to pitch his idea to Pharaoh so that the result will be that Joseph will be the man Pharaoh chooses. He's brilliant.

But does it matter that he's becoming Egyptian?

Who will lead the family after Jacob is gone?

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 2 **GENESIS 41:41-57**

JOSEPH IN CHARGE OF EGYPT

⁴¹ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." ⁴² Then Pharaoh took his signet ring from his hand and put it on Joseph's hand, and clothed him in garments of fine linen and put a gold chain about his neck. ⁴³ And he made him ride in his second chariot. And they called out before him, "Bow the knee!" Thus he set him over all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁴ Moreover, Pharaoh said to Joseph, "I am Pharaoh, and without your consent no one shall lift up hand or foot in all the land of Egypt." ⁴⁵ And Pharaoh called Joseph's name Zaphenath-paneah. And he gave him in marriage Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On. So Joseph went out over the land of Egypt.

⁴⁶ Joseph was thirty years old when he entered the service of Pharaoh king of Egypt. And Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh and went through all the land of Egypt. ⁴⁷ During the seven plentiful years the earth produced abundantly, ⁴⁸ and he gathered up all the food of these seven years, which occurred in the land of Egypt, and put the food in the cities. He put in every city the food from the fields around it.

⁴⁹ And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, like the sand of the sea, until he ceased to measure it, for it could not be measured.

⁵⁰ Before the year of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph. Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On, bore them to him. ⁵¹ Joseph called the name of the firstborn Manasseh. “For,” he said, “God has made me forget all my hardship and all my father’s house.” ⁵² The name of the second he called Ephraim, “For God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction.”

⁵³ The seven years of plenty that occurred in the land of Egypt came to an end, ⁵⁴ and the seven years of famine began to come, as Joseph had said. There was famine in all lands, but in all the land of Egypt there was bread. ⁵⁵ When all the land of Egypt was famished, the people cried to Pharaoh for bread. Pharaoh said to all the Egyptians, “Go to Joseph. What he says to you, do.”

⁵⁶ So when the famine had spread over all the land, Joseph opened all the storehouses and sold to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe in the land of Egypt. ⁵⁷ Moreover, all the earth came to Egypt to Joseph to buy grain, because the famine was severe over all the earth.

Quick thought on Joseph in Egypt. I think we are meant to see Joseph as a morally ambiguous character. He is brilliant, yes, and we are explicitly told that the Lord was with Joseph when he was enslaved and in prison, but after that, when he rises to his position of power *we are never told that again.*

I think the reason for that omission is that Joseph forgets where he came from. He marries an Egyptian woman and speaks and dresses like an Egyptian.

He does save his people, yes, but perhaps that still could have happened if he didn’t fully acculturate to Egypt.

Centuries and centuries later, Daniel rises to a position of power in a foreign land, *but Daniel never forgets his identity.*

How do you need to reclaim your identity as part of the people of God today?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 3
GENESIS 42:1-28

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS GO TO EGYPT

42 When Jacob learned that there was grain for sale in Egypt, he said to his sons, "Why do you look at one another?" ² And he said, "Behold, I have heard that there is grain for sale in Egypt. Go down and buy grain for us there, that we may live and not die." ³ So ten of Joseph's brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. ⁴ But Jacob did not send Benjamin, Joseph's brother, with his brothers, for he feared that harm might happen to him. ⁵ Thus the sons of Israel came to buy among the others who came, for the famine was in the land of Canaan.

⁶ Now Joseph was governor over the land. He was the one who sold to all the people of the land. And Joseph's brothers came and bowed themselves before him with their faces to the ground. ⁷ Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he treated them like strangers and spoke roughly to them. "Where do you come from?" he said. They said, "From the land of Canaan, to buy food." ⁸ And Joseph recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him. ⁹ And Joseph remembered the dreams that he had dreamed of them. And he said to them, "You are spies; you have come to see the nakedness of the land." ¹⁰ They said to him, "No, my lord, your servants have come to buy food. ¹¹ We are all sons of one man. We are honest men. Your servants have never been spies."

¹² He said to them, "No, it is the nakedness of the land that you have come to see." ¹³ And they said, "We, your servants, are twelve brothers, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan, and behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is no more." ¹⁴ But Joseph said to them, "It is as I said to you. You are spies. ¹⁵ By this you shall be tested: by the life of Pharaoh, you shall not go from this place unless your youngest brother comes here. ¹⁶ Send one of you, and let him bring your brother, while you remain confined, that your words may be tested, whether there is truth in you. Or else, by the life of Pharaoh, surely you are spies." ¹⁷ And he put them all together in custody for three days.

¹⁸ On the third day Joseph said to them, "Do this and you will live, for I fear God: ¹⁹ if you are honest men, let one of your brothers remain confined where you are in custody, and let the rest go and carry grain for the famine of your households, ²⁰ and bring your youngest brother

er to me. So your words will be verified, and you shall not die.” And they did so. ²¹ Then they said to one another, “In truth we are guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the distress of his soul, when he begged us and we did not listen. That is why this distress has come upon us.” ²² And Reuben answered them, “Did I not tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” ²³ They did not know that Joseph understood them, for there was an interpreter between them. ²⁴ Then he turned away from them and wept. And he returned to them and spoke to them. And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes. ²⁵ And Joseph gave orders to fill their bags with grain, and to replace every man’s money in his sack, and to give them provisions for the journey. This was done for them.

²⁶ Then they loaded their donkeys with their grain and departed.

²⁷ And as one of them opened his sack to give his donkey fodder at the lodging place, he saw his money in the mouth of his sack.

²⁸ He said to his brothers, “My money has been put back; here it is in the mouth of my sack!” At this their hearts failed them, and they turned trembling to one another, saying, “What is this that God has done to us?”

Joseph is re-creating his own story as a test for his brothers:

- They accused him of being a spy; now he accuses them of being spies;
- Joseph was imprisoned in Egypt; now, he has Simeon imprisoned in Egypt;
- Joseph was double-crossed by his brothers; now he double-crosses them;
- Joseph was sold into slavery, and his brothers received money and went home to their father without their missing brother; Joseph now gives them money as they return without their brother Simeon.

And the test is beginning to work. Look at their response: they begin to *tremble*. Over the long years, their consciences have been suppressed, but their hard hearts are beginning to soften.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4
GENESIS 42:29-38

29 When they came to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan, they told him all that had happened to them, saying, 30 “The man, the lord of the land, spoke roughly to us and took us to be spies of the land. 31 But we said to him, ‘We are honest men; we have never been spies. 32 We are twelve brothers, sons of our father. One is no more, and the youngest is this day with our father in the land of Canaan.’

33 Then the man, the lord of the land, said to us, ‘By this I shall know that you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, and take grain for the famine of your households, and go your way. 34 Bring your youngest brother to me. Then I shall know that you are not spies but honest men, and I will deliver your brother to you, and you shall trade in the land.’”

35 As they emptied their sacks, behold, every man’s bundle of money was in his sack. And when they and their father saw their bundles of money, they were afraid. 36 And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me of my children: Joseph is no more, and Simeon is no more, and now you would take Benjamin. All this has come against me.” 37 Then Reuben said to his father, “Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you. Put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you.” 38 But he said, “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is the only one left. If harm should happen to him on the journey that you are to make, you would bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to Sheol.”

Remember, the central question of Genesis 37-50 is:

Who will lead the family after Jacob is gone?

Reuben, the eldest, would seem to be an obvious candidate.

That is, until you notice something interesting whenever he appears in the story:

No one ever listens to him!

The basic definition of leader is a person whom other people follow. If no one is following, you’re not a leader. Period.

For whatever reason, the brothers don't follow Reuben.

For example, from today's reading:

³⁷ Then Reuben said to his father, "You may put both of my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to my care, and I will bring him back."

³⁸ But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray head down to the grave in sorrow."

Note that no one even seriously considers Reuben's suggestion, which is obviously ludicrous. Why would you kill the next generation for the sake of saving the previous one? He's an **idiot**.

Reuben will not be the next leader of the family.

Who will it be? There are 11 remaining possibilities.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 7

GENESIS 43:1-14

JOSEPH'S BROTHERS RETURN TO EGYPT

43 Now the famine was severe in the land. ² And when they had eaten the grain that they had brought from Egypt, their father said to them, "Go again, buy us a little food." ³ But Judah said to him, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' ⁴ If you will send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. ⁵ But if you will not send him, we will not go down, for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face, unless your brother is with you.'" ⁶ Israel said, "Why did you treat me so badly as to tell the man that you had another brother?" ⁷ They replied, "The man questioned us carefully about ourselves and our kindred, saying, 'Is your father still alive? Do you have another brother?' What we told him was in answer to these questions. Could we in any way know that he would say, 'Bring your brother down?'" ⁸ And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. ⁹ I will be a pledge of his safety. From my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. ¹⁰ If we had not delayed, we would now have returned twice."

¹¹ Then their father Israel said to them, “If it must be so, then do this: take some of the choice fruits of the land in your bags, and carry a present down to the man, a little balm and a little honey, gum, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. ¹² Take double the money with you. Carry back with you the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks. Perhaps it was an oversight. ¹³ Take also your brother, and arise, go again to the man. ¹⁴ May God Almighty grant you mercy before the man, and may he send back your other brother and Benjamin. And as for me, if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved.”

Remember, this is the central question of Genesis 37-50:

Which brother will lead the family after Jacob is gone?

REUBEN, SIMEON, LEVI, OR JUDAH?

Reuben, as we saw Friday, is not a leader. (Plus, he slept with his father’s wife/concubine, i.e., the *mother of 2 of his half-brothers!* [See Genesis 35:21-22].)

The 2nd and 3rd brothers are Simeon and Levi. They seem to be hot-headed and bloodthirsty, as they are the ones who led the massacre of the city of Shechem, after Shechem raped their sister Dinah. (See the sad story told in Genesis 34.)

(By the way, I have no proof of this, but I wonder if Simeon is one of the instigators of the plan to murder Joseph and cover it up with animal’s blood [See Genesis 37.] This would explain why Joseph chooses Simeon as the one to stay behind in Egypt: “And he took Simeon from them and bound him before their eyes.” [Genesis 42:24].)

So, that leaves Judah. Could he be the one to lead the family after Jacob?

The last we heard much about Judah was in Genesis 38, when he is morally humbled after he (unknowingly) impregnates his daughter-in-law. (I KNOW!)

But here, he makes a beautiful speech to their father Jacob and offers to take full responsibility for Benjamin’s safety so they can return to Egypt and get food so that the family can survive.

His speech works, and Jacob gives his leave for Benjamin to go with the brothers on their return journey to Egypt.

Could Judah be the one?

P.S. Note that, unlike the last time the brothers returned without their missing brother—the time when they sold Joseph into slavery—this time they tell the whole truth to their father....

P.P.S. Jacob is here having his own Mount Moriah moment. You'll remember that back in Genesis 21 we read about the culminating event of Abraham's life: his giving up of the beloved son of his old age, Isaac. Here Jacob does the same thing by agreeing to send Benjamin.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 8
GENESIS 43:15-34

¹⁵ So the men took this present, and they took double the money with them, and Benjamin. They arose and went down to Egypt and stood before Joseph.

¹⁶ When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to the steward of his house, "Bring the men into the house, and slaughter an animal and make ready, for the men are to dine with me at noon." ¹⁷ The man did as Joseph told him and brought the men to Joseph's house. ¹⁸ And the men were afraid because they were brought to Joseph's house, and they said, "It is because of the money, which was replaced in our sacks the first time, that we are brought in, so that he may assault us and fall upon us to make us servants and seize our donkeys." ¹⁹ So they went up to the steward of Joseph's house and spoke with him at the door of the house, ²⁰ and said, "Oh, my lord, we came down the first time to buy food. ²¹ And when we came to the lodging place we opened our sacks, and there was each man's money in the mouth of his sack, our money in full weight. So we have brought it again with us, ²² and we have brought other money down with us to buy food. We do not know who put our money in our sacks." ²³ He replied, "Peace to you, do not be afraid. Your God and the God of your father has put treasure in your sacks for you. I received your money." Then he brought Simeon out to them. ²⁴ And when the man had brought the men into Joseph's house and given them water, and they had washed their feet, and when he had given their donkeys fodder, ²⁵ they prepared the present for Joseph's coming at noon, for they heard that they should eat bread there.

²⁶ When Joseph came home, they brought into the house to him the present that they had with them and bowed down to him to the ground.

²⁷ And he inquired about their welfare and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" ²⁸ They said, "Your servant our father is well; he is still alive." And they bowed their heads and prostrated themselves. ²⁹ And he lifted up his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your youngest brother, of whom you spoke to me? God be gracious to you, my son!" ³⁰ Then Joseph hurried out, for his compassion grew warm for his brother, and he sought a place to weep. And he entered his chamber and wept there. ³¹ Then he washed his face and came out. And controlling himself he said, "Serve the food." ³² They served him by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him by themselves, because the Egyptians could not eat with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians. ³³ And they sat before him, the firstborn according to his birthright and the youngest according to his youth. And the men looked at one another in amazement. ³⁴ Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

I think the ending of today's passage is deeply moving. Go back and read it again and try to *see* and *feel* it—imagine the intensity of the scene.

Again, Joseph's ploy is to recreate the situation that led to his sojourn in Egypt. When he was a young boy, his father singled him out and gave him a gift that his brothers did not receive—the many-colored coat. Here, Joseph singles out Benjamin at the expense of his brothers: he activates their jealousy by giving Benjamin five times more than the rest of them.

When Joseph was younger, jealousy led to a great evil.

What will happen now?

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 9
GENESIS 44:1-13

A SILVER CUP IN A SACK

44 Then he commanded the steward of his house, "Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man's money

in the mouth of his sack, 2 and put my cup, the silver cup, in the mouth of the sack of the youngest, with his money for the grain.” And he did as Joseph told him.

³ As soon as the morning was light, the men were sent away with their donkeys. ⁴ They had gone only a short distance from the city. Now Joseph said to his steward, “Up, follow after the men, and when you overtake them, say to them, ‘Why have you repaid evil for good?’ ⁵ Is it not from this that my lord drinks, and by this that he practices divination? You have done evil in doing this.’”

⁶ When he overtook them, he spoke to them these words. ⁷ They said to him, “Why does my lord speak such words as these? Far be it from your servants to do such a thing! ⁸ Behold, the money that we found in the mouths of our sacks we brought back to you from the land of Canaan. How then could we steal silver or gold from your lord's house? ⁹ Whichever of your servants is found with it shall die, and we also will be my lord's servants.” ¹⁰ He said, “Let it be as you say: he who is found with it shall be my servant, and the rest of you shall be innocent.”

¹¹ Then each man quickly lowered his sack to the ground, and each man opened his sack. ¹² And he searched, beginning with the eldest and ending with the youngest. And the cup was found in Benjamin's sack. ¹³ Then they tore their clothes, and every man loaded his donkey, and they returned to the city.

The crisis that Joseph has been working towards has finally arrived. How will the murderous, jealous, treacherous sons of Jacob—himself a treacherous, back-stabbing, “heel-grabbing” man [remember, Jacob means “heel-grabber” in Hebrew]—how will Jacob's sons respond to Joseph's trap?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 10 **GENESIS 44:14-34**

¹⁴ When Judah and his brothers came to Joseph's house, he was still there. They fell before him to the ground. ¹⁵ Joseph said to them, “What deed is this that you have done? Do you not know that a man like me can indeed practice divination?” ¹⁶ And Judah said, “What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak? Or how can we clear ourselves? God has found out the guilt of your servants; behold, we

are my lord's servants, both we and he also in whose hand the cup has been found.”¹⁷ But he said, “Far be it from me that I should do so! Only the man in whose hand the cup was found shall be my servant. But as for you, go up in peace to your father.”

¹⁸ Then Judah went up to him and said, “Oh, my lord, please let your servant speak a word in my lord's ears, and let not your anger burn against your servant, for you are like Pharaoh himself.”¹⁹ My lord asked his servants, saying, ‘Have you a father, or a brother?’²⁰ And we said to my lord, ‘We have a father, an old man, and a young brother, the child of his old age. His brother is dead, and he alone is left of his mother's children, and his father loves him.’²¹ Then you said to your servants, ‘Bring him down to me, that I may set my eyes on him.’²² We said to my lord, ‘The boy cannot leave his father, for if he should leave his father, his father would die.’²³ Then you said to your servants, ‘Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not see my face again.’

²⁴ “When we went back to your servant my father, we told him the words of my lord.”²⁵ And when our father said, ‘Go again, buy us a little food,’²⁶ we said, ‘We cannot go down. If our youngest brother goes with us, then we will go down. For we cannot see the man's face unless our youngest brother is with us.’²⁷ Then your servant my father said to us, ‘You know that my wife bore me two sons.’²⁸ One left me, and I said, “Surely he has been torn to pieces,” and I have never seen him since.”²⁹ If you take this one also from me, and harm happens to him, you will bring down my gray hairs in evil to Sheol.’

³⁰ “Now therefore, as soon as I come to your servant my father, and the boy is not with us, then, as his life is bound up in the boy's life,³¹ as soon as he sees that the boy is not with us, he will die, and your servants will bring down the gray hairs of your servant our father with sorrow to Sheol.”³² For your servant became a pledge of safety for the boy to my father, saying, ‘If I do not bring him back to you, then I shall bear the blame before my father all my life.’³³ Now therefore, please let your servant remain instead of the boy as a servant to my lord, and let the boy go back with his brothers.”³⁴ For how can I go back to my father if the boy is not with me? I fear to see the evil that would find my father.”

This is the longest speech in Genesis, and one of the longest in the entire Bible. It's a beautiful, statesmanlike speech, moving in its raw, honest emotion.

It's the action that finally breaks the heart of Joseph and pierces through his fierce exterior.

And guess what it's about: a man (Judah) who is willing to give his life for his brother (Benjamin). Joseph has brought the family to the point where the one who before sold his brother into slavery (remember it was Judah who suggested way back in Genesis 37 that the brothers sell Joseph off) is now humbled and so full of love that he will lay down his life to preserve the life of another young brother.

Which brother will be the one to lead the family into the next generation?

We are getting closer to an answer.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 11
GENESIS 45:1-15

JOSEPH PROVIDES FOR HIS BROTHERS AND FAMILY

45 Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, "Make everyone go out from me." So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ² And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?" But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

⁴ So Joseph said to his brothers, "Come near to me, please." And they came near. And he said, "I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵ And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. ⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, 'Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰ You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you

have, do not come to poverty.’¹² And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you.¹³ You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.”¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck.¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him.

This is one of the great scenes of the Bible: the reunification of the Sons of Jacob.

And one of its lessons is this: Eden can be *anywhere*.

Since Genesis 3, God's people have been exiled from Eden, but God has constantly been blessing them anyway. And here, in Egypt—of all places(!)—the family of Abraham finds blessing and abundance. That is, they find Eden.

All it took was for one man to sacrifice himself for the many....

(Let the reader understand.)

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 14
GENESIS 45:16-28

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, “Joseph's brothers have come,” it pleased Pharaoh and his servants.¹⁷ And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of Canaan,¹⁸ and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.’¹⁹ And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come.’²⁰ Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.”

²¹ The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey.²² To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five changes of clothes.

²³ To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good

things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴ Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way.”

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶ And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.”

One little detail that I love about today’s reading: the simple instruction Joseph gives his brothers:

“Do not quarrel on the way.”

Ha.

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 15

GENESIS 46:1-27

JOSEPH BRINGS HIS FAMILY TO EGYPT

46 So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” ³ Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”

⁵ Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷ his sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

⁸ Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, ⁹ and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰ The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹ The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹² The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³ The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron. ¹⁴ The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. ¹⁵ These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.

¹⁶ The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷ The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. ¹⁸ These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰ And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him. ²¹ And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²² These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all. ²³ The son of Dan: Hushim. ²⁴ The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵ These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.

²⁶ All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷ And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

It's been a long, long time since Jacob has heard from the Lord. And here, as Jacob is weighing the decision to go to Egypt, the Lord speaks to him in a vision in the night and reassures him that going to Egypt is the right thing to do.

And so Jacob goes.

I wonder if it was important for later Israelites to understand that the decision for Jacob's family to go to Egypt was NOT a mistake, though

it would later lead to their enslavement. It was God's gracious, guiding hand that brought them there, just as it would be God's mighty right arm that would later bring them out.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 16
GENESIS 48:28-47:12

JACOB AND JOSEPH REUNITED

²⁸ He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. ²⁹ Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. ³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." ³¹ Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, "I will go up and tell Pharaoh and will say to him, 'My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³² And the men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock, and they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have.' ³³ When Pharaoh calls you and says, 'What is your occupation?' ³⁴ you shall say, 'Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,' in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen, for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

JACOB'S FAMILY SETTLES IN GOSHEN

47 So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen." ² And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. ³ Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were." ⁴ They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." ⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶ The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

⁷ Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ And Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many are the days of the years of your life?" ⁹ And Jacob said to

Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.”¹⁰ And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh.¹¹ Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded.¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

Family is how we fight.

That’s a phrase I use that—to me—sums up the entire biblical story.

See, when, after Babel (see Genesis 11), God starts to put his plan into action to rescue his Creation, he starts *with one man and his family*:

I2 *Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. [Genesis 12:1-3]*

The Lord’s promise is to use Abraham’s family to bring blessing to the world.

When I say, “Family is how we fight,” what I mean is that it’s the focus on being the people of God—the *Family* of God—that is our primary way of fighting back against evil and bringing blessing into the world.

So, don’t miss the significance of what happens with Pharaoh: rather than Jacob coming in subservience to Pharaoh, Pharaoh comes and receives a blessing from Jacob.

Just as the Lord said would happen.

How can you be a conduit for Edenic blessing today?

THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 17
GENESIS 47:13-31

JOSEPH AND THE FAMINE

¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. ¹⁴ And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought. And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. ¹⁵ And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone." ¹⁶ And Joseph answered, "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. ¹⁸ And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent. The herds of livestock are my lord's. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land.

¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate."

²⁰ So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for all the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe on them. The land became Pharaoh's. ²¹ As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other. ²² Only the land of the priests he did not buy, for the priests had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on the allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land.

²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones."

²⁵ And they said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh." ²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

²⁸ And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 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 kindly 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.

I wonder if we're supposed to see Joseph's economic measures as morally questionable. Yes, he saves Egypt and the Middle East from starvation through his prudent planning, but he also enriches Pharaoh and strengthens Pharaoh's grip over all of Egypt, thereby turning the people into little more than indentured servants to Pharaoh. Could not he have saved the people another way? Will these measures come back to haunt the Israelites later? Here, an Israelite causes the Egyptians to essentially become enslaved. Later, the Egyptians will return the favor and enslave the Israelites.

It's worth considering.

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 18

GENESIS 48:1-22

JACOB BLESSES EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

48 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 offspring after you for an everlasting possession.’ 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 children that you fathered after them shall

be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷ As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel 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, please, 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 never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring 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 on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). ¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph and said,

“The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day,
¹⁶ the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the boys;
and in them let my name be carried on, and the name of my fathers
Abraham and Isaac;
and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, “Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on 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 offspring 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.’”

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 that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.”

I think Jacob’s blessing of Joseph’s two sons is fascinating. Jacob is blind, but he can still “see” and he deliberately blesses the younger—Ephraim—over the elder—Manasseh. He even crosses his hands to do so. An amazing scene.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 21
GENESIS 49:1-27

JACOB BLESSES HIS SONS

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

² “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob,
listen to Israel your father.

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

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

⁵ “Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their swords.

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

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 cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.

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

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

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

¹² His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than 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 donkey,
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 servant 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 your 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 delicacies.

²¹ "Naphtali is a doe let loose
that bears beautiful fawns.

²² "Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.

²³ The archers bitterly attacked him,
shot at him, and harassed him severely,
²⁴ yet his bow remained unmoved;
his arms were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
²⁵ by the God of your father who will help you,
by the Almighty who will bless you

with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that crouches beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
²⁶ The blessings of your father
are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents,
up to the bounties of the everlasting hills.
May they be on the head of Joseph,
and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.
²⁷ “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf,
in the morning devouring the prey
and at evening dividing the spoil.”

QUICK BULLETS ON THE JOSEPH STORY

- I think the Bible wants us to have an ambivalent opinion on Joseph: on the one hand, he is obviously a genius, but on the other hand he becomes totally Egyptianized, which is not good because it means he's forgotten that he is a child of Israel.
- The Bible makes it clear that the Lord was with Joseph when he was enslaved and imprisoned, but we aren't told that the Lord is with Joseph when he is raised to power in Egypt. Why? I think it's because it seems that Joseph forgets the Lord when he is delivered from prison and raised to power. As I mentioned above, he becomes so totally acculturated in Egypt that he doesn't even live with his family when they settle in Goshen!
- Hundreds and hundreds of years later, Daniel is an Israelite who finds himself serving a foreign king—in this case, the Babylonian Emperor Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel, however, never gives up on his Israelite identity, and God still uses him and he still retains his high position.
- I wonder if Joseph's problem was thinking that there is no way he could have kept his high position apart from turning his back on his heritage. Of course, if the Lord wanted Joseph to be Pharaoh's right hand, then it would have happened. It is almost as if Joseph stops trusting in the Lord at the very moment when things begin to turn around for him.
- All throughout the story of Joseph the central question has been, Who will lead the family after Jacob is gone? Jacob's final blessings of his sons tell us the answer (though we've already figured it out): Judah, the fourth son, will be the leader! Read the blessings care-

fully and see how Jacob *hasn't missed anything*. He remembers, e.g., how Reuben slept with his wife/concubine so many years before, and how Simeon and Levi led the brutal slaughter at Shechem. By the way, Judah is the tribe from which David comes, and later Jesus. Do you know that praise song "Lion and the Lamb"? This is why the songwriter in that song describes the Lord as "the Lion of Judah".

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 22
GENESIS 49:28-50:14

JACOB'S DEATH AND BURIAL

²⁸ All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.

²⁹ Then he commanded them and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place.

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 bought from the Hittites." ³³ When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

50 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 that is how 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, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, ⁵ 'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me." Now therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.'" ⁶ And Pharaoh answered, "Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear." ⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders

of the land of Egypt,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 grievous 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 by the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named 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 Machpelah, 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.

THOUGHTS ON THE DEATH OF JACOB, OUR PENULTIMATE READING

I have a bit more to say tomorrow about our final day's reading, but I want to leave you with what is one of the most powerful images in all of the Bible: the burial of Jacob.

Remember, Joseph has forgiven his brothers, but they are not really reconciled with each other. Joseph, the right hand of Pharaoh himself—is living like an Egyptian, whereas Israel and his sons are living as shepherds in Goshen, sojourning in a foreign land. Joseph has settled the family there, but for all intents and purposes he is not one of them any more.

Jacob's death, however, unites the brothers for one last time.

Jacob makes his 12 sons swear a deathbed oath (the same oath, by the way, that Joseph will subsequently make his descendants swear to him):

²⁹ Then he gave them these instructions: "I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. ³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and

his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah. ³² The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”

³³ When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people. [Genesis 49:29-33]

Jacob, whose life’s journey has been long and winding, knows that his place is in the Promised Land, and so he will be buried with his fathers.

Joseph gets the necessary permission from Pharaoh and then joins the whole company as they make the long sad trek back to the land that the Lord promised Abraham.

And then we get what is one of the most moving images in the entire Bible:

¹² So Jacob’s sons did as he had commanded them: ¹³ They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. [Genesis 50:12-13]

Jacob’s 12 sons, erstwhile enemies in life, united in the death of their father:

The twelve sons of Jacob carry their father on their shoulders as they lay him to rest with his fathers in the land of Promise.

Wow.

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 23 GENESIS 50:15-26

GOD’S GOOD PURPOSES

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 that 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, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.” And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.’” Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your servants.” ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, 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 comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

²² So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. 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 that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.” ²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here.” ²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Today we've come to the end of a great work of art—a masterpiece and a wonder—and I feel a sense of loss. It's bittersweet to have finished the Book of Genesis, because reading and working through it these last 3 months—my first 3 months at Asbury!—has been one of the most thrilling experiences I have ever had with scripture. I am in awe at the beauty and power of the first book of the Bible and am deeply moved that the Lord who can create light with one word would choose one man and one family as the means by which he would save the world. “From you,” the Lord says to Abraham, “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.”

Genesis is the book of beginnings, but until the Lord returns and the New Heavens and New Earth are begun, all things in this world must come to an end. And so, here we are.

And yet every ending is also a beginning, and the ending of Genesis is no different: it ends and the story of Israel begins.

The final chapter of Genesis also contains one of the greatest descriptions of the grace of God in all of the Old Testament, and even, perhaps, outside of it.

Jacob has died, and the brothers immediately fear that Joseph will now seek vengeance on them for the evil they did to him so many years before. Joseph, as I have been saying, is a complicated moral figure, but here—perhaps in spite of himself—he so perfectly captures what the grace of God is like that I'm not sure anyone apart from Jesus himself has ever said it better:

“What you intended for evil, God intended for good.” [Genesis 50:20]

Is there a better verse for Good Friday?

What we intended for evil—the Crucifixion of the Son of God—God intended for the ultimate Good.

Cross before Crown, yes, but don’t ever forget that Crown follows Cross.

The rest of the entire Bible—which is really one unified story that leads to Jesus—will be about God using human evil to bring about the Good News of the Gospel.

Amen.

P.S. Like all great stories, Genesis ends with a note of sadness and with a few loose ends. Joseph dies, but unlike Jacob, he is not buried back in the Promised Land. Before his death, I think he sees clearly the mistakes he has made in Egypt by turning his back on his heritage; he tells his descendants that they will need the help of God to get out of Egypt and return to the Promised Land, and he makes them promise that when that day finally comes they will carry his bones with them back to the land of his fathers.

And then he dies, and is embalmed after the custom of the Egyptians.

And so Genesis ends and the last sentence will take your breath away:

The book closes with Joseph as a mummy in Egypt.

P.P.S. But the Children of Israel never forgot their promise to Joseph. And generation unto generation, they were reminded that the day would come when God would bring them out of slavery, and that when that day came, they were to carry the bones of their brilliant ancestor Joseph with them. And so, this is what happens when the long-awaited Exodus finally occurs, so many centuries later:

¹⁹ Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.” [Exodus 13:19]

I said before that Genesis ends without all the loose ends tied up. That may be true, but you know what?

In God’s time, all loose ends are eventually tied up. There are no details that the author of Creation forgets.

**THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 24
THANKSGIVING DAY!**

MY OWN PERSONAL READING PLAN

I have my own personal reading plan that I've been following for several years now: I read one psalm a day, every day. There are 150 psalms, so when I get to Psalm 150, the next day I start again with Psalm 1.

Because I'm writing and working on future reading plans (Revelation begins January 2!), I don't always read the churchwide current reading on its specified day. Instead, I always keep pushing on with my reading plan through the Psalms, one psalm a day, rinse and repeat when I get to Psalm 150.

There is a simplicity to this plan that really appeals to me, and I find beginning each day with a psalm to be a comfort (even when the psalms are sometimes dark and violent!). I have an app on my phone that tells me each morning what number psalm I'm on that day. (Unlike our churchwide reading plans, my reading plan through the Psalms is 7 days a week, so I read one on Saturday and Sunday, too.)

You are certainly welcome to join me in my practice. Our Advent reading plan begins on Monday, November 28, but if you're interested in following along with my Psalms reading plan, today is Psalm 57.

Psalm 58 will be Friday.

Psalm 59 will be Saturday.

Psalm 60 will be Sunday. You get the idea.

Happy Thanksgiving!

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