

Week Six

Living in the Shelter of a Sovereign God . . .

When You Must Walk by Faith

Romans 4:19-21 says that “Without becoming weak in faith [Abraham] contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.” Abraham’s example teaches us that faith is not shutting our eyes to reality. It’s not ignoring the fact that we’re too old, or too weak, or too late. It’s not turning a blind eye to the massive roadblocks ahead, the enemies chomping at the bit to bring us down, or the tragedy that has been written across our lives thus far. Faith is taking our “impossible” circumstances, placing them side-by-side with the power, sovereignty, wisdom, love and faithfulness of God, and then choosing to trust that the ultimate reality is **not** what we see or feel at the moment, but what we know, without any doubt, God is doing for our good and for His glory. *Because He said so.*

This week we will get to see the generational impact of Abraham’s unwavering commitment to believe God in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances. Jacob’s faith, having been refined for so many years in the fiery furnace of profound loss, deep grief and persistent disappointment, will emerge as something incredibly beautiful in the last few years of his life, reminding us *that it’s never too late to leave a legacy of faith.*

And then there’s Joseph – our beloved Joseph - whose faith is demonstrated throughout the story, but never so much as when he contemplates his own death and makes some very specific plans for his bones. Yes, I said bones. And yes, we have a very interesting week of study ahead of us!

The homework this week will take you all the way to the end of the narrative, but that’s not the end of the study. Next week we will hit the rewind button, walk back through Joseph’s life, and see if he reminds us of anyone special. I have a feeling it might be your favorite week, so hang in there!

Day 1

Read **Genesis 46:1-30** and answer the following questions.

- 1) What does Israel/Jacob do in 46:1a?

- 2) Until now, each time Jacob had made an important move God had spoken to him directly. Briefly summarize what God said to Jacob each time he had moved in the past:
 - When he left his parents' house to go to Haran (Genesis 28:10-15)

 - When it was time to leave Laban's house (Genesis 31:3)

 - When he left Shechem (Genesis 35:1, 9-12)

- 3) In light of what God had said and done in the past, why might Jacob be reluctant to move his family **out** of Canaan and into Egypt now?

- 4) What do you think gave Jacob the confidence to pack up and head toward Egypt **before** receiving any direct word from God? Consider the recent events that had taken place (Genesis 45:26-28) as well as the economic conditions in Canaan (Genesis 43:1).

A closer look: Henry Morris draws out some great application from Jacob's example here: "All the circumstances indicated that [moving to Egypt] was what Jacob should do; and so he went out, trusting the Lord somehow to shut this door if it were not His will for them to move. When God, through circumstances, appears to be leading a child of His into some new place, this is the proper course to follow. Assuming there is no Scripture to the contrary, one should proceed

according to his best judgment and at the same time continue in prayer for guidance. He can have confidence then that the Lord will either bless his decision or else overrule or redirect.¹

- 5) What did Jacob do when he came to Beersheba?

- 6) What significant event in Jacob's father Isaac's life took place at Beersheba that made it a good place to stop and seek the Lord? (Genesis 26:23-25)

- 7) Did God bless Jacob's decision to move the family to Egypt or did He redirect him back to Canaan? (Genesis 46:2-4)

- 8) God gives Jacob 4 reasons to continue toward Egypt with confidence. What are they? (Genesis 46:3, 4)

- 9) When have you had to make a decision/move ahead based on your best judgment concerning the circumstances and then prayerfully trust that the Lord would either bless it, overrule it, or redirect it as you went?

What truths from God's Word comforted/guided you as you set out in faith?

How did God confirm His will to you along the way?

- 10) If you're like me you aren't a fan of genealogies. All those crazy names can be so tedious to read! Rest assured that I'm not going to ask any detailed questions about verses 8-27, but I do want you to take note of the basic structure and numbers by completing the following chart:

	The sons of . . . (list mother's name)	Total number
46:8-15		
46:16-18		
46:19-22		
46:23-25		

A closer look: If the numbers confuse you a bit, you aren't alone! As K. A. Matthews notes, "The concluding verses are problematic for interpreters, since there are two related but different counts given (sixty-six and seventy), and it is uncertain how the author arrived at the two counts."² There are all kinds of suggestions as to exactly who those numbers reflect. The important thing for us to walk away with is a realization of how *small* Jacob's clan was when they arrived in Egypt compared to how *huge* it was (approximately 2 million!) when God moved them back to Canaan some 400 years later (see Genesis 15:5; Exodus 1:7, 20; Numbers 1, 22:5; Duet. 1:10). Here we have yet another set-up to marvel at God's faithfulness to fulfill His covenant promises and bless His people!

- 11) Describe the scene when Joseph is reunited with his father. (Genesis 46:29, 30)

Pass the tissues please!

Day 2

Read **Genesis 46:31-47:12** then **47:27-31** (we've already covered verses 13-26) and answer the following questions.

- 1) What did Joseph want to make sure Pharaoh knew about his family? (Genesis 46:32-34)
- 2) Why did he want Pharaoh to know this? (Genesis 46:34)

"So that you may live in the land of _____."

- 3) How did the Egyptians feel about shepherds? (46:34)

If you have easy access to a dictionary, look up and define the word "loathsome" (NASB), "detestable" (NIV), or "abominable" (KJV).

- 4) How might being "loathsome" to the Egyptians be an advantage for this small clan of Israelites?

A closer look: This was a PERFECT setup for Jacob's family! They got to come to Egypt where Joseph could supply all of their needs but they didn't have to mingle with the Egyptian people (and their pagan, polytheistic, idolatrous religion). In fact, because they were herdsman/shepherds, they **couldn't** mingle with the Egyptian people even if they wanted to!

God takes them away from the pagan influences and faltering economy of Canaan and plants them in the fertile land of Goshen where both their families **AND** their faith could multiply! Who would have ever thought that Egypt of all places would serve as the perfect “incubator” for this family of promise? Only an all-wise, all-knowing, sovereign God!

5) How does Jacob describe his life in 47:9?

Does this strike you as a complaint or simply an honest reflection?

6) What “unpleasant” (NASB) or “difficult” (NIV) circumstances had Jacob endured in his lifetime? (Think as far back as you can.)

7) Describe the contrast between what the Egyptian people experience in 47:18-20 and what Jacob’s family experiences in 47:27.

8) What did Joseph swear to do for his father? (47:29-31)

9) How does Jacob’s request demonstrate faith? (You may want to look back at the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 17:8 and reconfirmed to Jacob in Genesis 28:14, 15.)

A closer look: Chances are nobody has ever asked you to make a promise by placing your hand under their thigh. In our culture that would be CREEPY to say the least! In this context “thigh” is a euphemism for the reproductive organ. In that day, placing ones hand near the reproductive organ emphasized that the promise would affect not just the two people entering into the agreement, but generations to come. When Jacob asked Joseph to swear *not* to bury him in Egypt, he was looking way ahead into the future when God would fulfill the covenant made long ago to Abraham to “give to [him] and his descendants the land of [their] sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:8). Jacob didn’t want to be buried in Egypt because he was confident his family wasn’t going to stay there! “Few and

unpleasant” may have been the year of *his* life, but he was full of hope for the lives of those who would come after him.

10) Some translate the word “bowed” in 47:31 as “bowed *in worship*” (reflected in the NIV and NASB translations). If this is the case, why might Joseph’s solemn promise to bury him in Canaan lead Jacob to bow before God in worship?

11) What is one thing that God has promised you that you cannot see yet but are absolutely confident He will do? (Provide the Scripture reference if possible.)

Will you take a moment and bow before Him in worship as you reflect on His past, present, and future faithfulness in your life?

Day 3

Read Genesis **48:1-22** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Approximately how long had Jacob been in Egypt when the events of chapter 48 take place? (47:28)

A closer look: As your study this chapter, keep in mind that it describes more than Jacob's dying wish. In that day, the bestowal of a blessing by a dying patriarch had irrevocable authority.

I thought about making you do some math to figure out the approximate ages of Joseph and his sons at this point, but who wants to do math in Bible study? From what I can tell from the time clues we are given, Joseph was in his late fifties and his sons were in their mid-to-late twenties.

- 2) Of what did Jacob remind Joseph before bestowing the blessing? (48:3, 4)
 - He received a blessing directly from _____ at Luz.
 - He was promised the land of _____ as an everlasting possession for his _____.
- 3) In 48:5 and 6 Jacob adopts Joseph's sons as his own and apparently transfers the rights of firstborn from Rueben to Joseph. Who and what was on his mind as he did this? (48:7)

From what you know about Jacob's relationship with Rachel (and how it impacted his view of Joseph), why is this significant?

- 4) Why was the birthright taken from Rueben (who was technically the firstborn) according to 1 Chronicles 5:1?

A closer look: Verse 8 seems a bit strange in light of the fact that Jacob appears to have already known who was with Joseph. He most likely states the question to formally initiate the blessing ceremony.

5) How had God far exceeded Jacob's wildest expectations? (48:11)

6) How is God described by Jacob in 48: 15 and 16?

A closer look: When something is mentioned for the first time in the Bible, we should take note. Interestingly enough, there are **two** first mentions in Jacob's blessing. Though most of us are incredibly familiar with the biblical metaphor of God being our Shepherd, Jacob is the first person to ever make that connection and he does so here in 48:15. Jacob's blessing is also the first time the word "redeemed" is used in the Bible. The Hebrew word is *goel* and it means "to save" or "to be a savior or deliverer." Many scholars believe that "the angel" who redeems in verse 16 is Christ Himself. Charles Ryrie explains the connection: "Because the angel of the Lord ceases to appear after the incarnation, it is often inferred that the angel in the Old Testament is a pre-incarnate appearance of the second person of the trinity."³

7) When you compare Jacob's words to Pharaoh in 47:9 to his words to Joseph and Joseph's sons in 48:15 and 16, what had changed in the (almost) 17 years he spent in Egypt?

8) In Joel 2:25, after a season of absolute desolation that God brought upon His people, He says, "Then I will make up to you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten . . . You shall have plenty to eat and be satisfied and praise the name of the Lord who has dealt wondrously with you." How have you seen God do the same thing in Jacob's life?

9) You may or may not have lived long enough to answer this question, but if you have: How have you seen God restore/redeem your past by blessing you far beyond your expectations? In other words, regardless of how “few and unpleasant” a significant chunk of your life may have been, how has God “dealt wondrously with you?”

10) What bothered Joseph about the set-up of the blessing? (48:14, 17, 18)

How did Jacob respond to Joseph’s rebuke? (48:19)

11) Read Hebrews 11:21 and complete the sentence accordingly:

“By faith, Jacob, as he was dying _____
_____, and worshipped, leaning on the top of his staff.”

12) How is faith demonstrated in Jacob’s blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh?

A closer look: In verse 17 there is an obvious reference to Joseph’s ability to see, whereas verse 10 makes it ever-so-clear that Jacob’s vision had failed. Ironically, *on a spiritual level* it was Jacob who could see and Joseph who could not! Joseph expected God to work in a certain way – the most obvious, logical way – by blessing the older over the younger. But God had something else in mind, which He had clearly communicated to Jacob. So when Jacob says to Joseph, “I know, I know . . . **however**” (48:19), he is acting according to divine plan, not normal custom. He does this by faith, of course, relying not on what could be seen at the moment, but on what God had revealed to him concerning the future. Interestingly enough, this is the fourth instance so far of God favoring the younger over the older (Isaac was favored over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Joseph over Reuben).

13) How have you been tempted lately to walk by sight rather than by faith?

Why is it so important for you to submit to what God has revealed rather than simply doing what makes the most sense at the time?

Day 4

Read **Genesis 49:1-28** and answer the following questions.

- 1) What is the purpose of Jacob's words in this chapter? (49:1)

- 2) What is said about these blessings in 49:28?

A closer look: Jacob's dying words to his sons are obviously *not* the run-of-the-mill, generic "may God bless you, keep you, make His face shine upon you" kind of blessing. His words are intentionally prophetic, specifically tailored to each son, and based on what God had directly revealed to Jacob in his last days. Though the bulk of the prophecy relates to what will take place when the nation of Israel occupies Canaan, there are clear references to the time of the coming of the Messiah as well. (I have chosen not to have you identify how and when each prophecy was or will be fulfilled. Any decent study Bible will give you the relevant cross references if that is something that interests you.)

- 3) Which of the brothers are given positive blessings/prophecies? (49:3-27)

- 4) What disqualified the following brothers from a favorable blessing/prophecy?
 - Rueben (49:3, 4)

- Simeon and Levi (49:5-7)

5) Which two sons are given the longest blessings/prophecies?

What stands out the most to you about Judah's blessing?

Who does Judah's blessing ultimately point to? (Matthew 1:1-3; Revelation 5:5)

What stands out to you the most about Joseph's blessing?

6) Jacob uses 5 titles for God in 49:24, 25. List them.

7) I love how 49:24 is worded in the New King James Version: "But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty God of Jacob."

Who was the source of Joseph's strength?

Thinking back over everything we have studied so far, jot down some *specific examples* of how God Almighty had strengthened Joseph throughout his life.

- 8) How has the Mighty One of Jacob, the Rock of Israel strengthened you in the past? How has He strengthened you recently?

How has God proven Himself to be a faithful Shepherd in your life?

Day 5

Read **Genesis 49:29-50:14** then **50:22-26** and answer the following questions.

- 1) Jacob had already discussed his burial wishes with Joseph, but he goes into much greater detail right before he dies. Where and next to whom does he wish to be buried? (49:29-32)

- 2) Considering Jacob's struggles, the progression of his faith, and the activity of God in his life, write your own epitaph for Jacob/Israel:

"Here lies _____

_____."

- 3) Who went with Joseph to bury his father? (50:7-9)
- 4) Joseph was in his late 50's at this point. Approximately how long had it been since he'd last been to Canaan? (37:2)

- 5) Describe what takes place when they get the burial site. (50:10-13)

A closer look: Here's an exciting "big picture" insight for you from Kent Hughes' commentary on Genesis:

The procession from Egypt to Canaan was a mini-rehearsal of Israel's grand exodus from Egypt. Many of the words and descriptives used here to portray the procession – "servants of Pharaoh," "flocks," "herds," "chariots," "horsemen," and "great company" – occur again in the story of the exodus. Now Joseph bore the bones of Jacob to the promised land, but then Joseph's bones would be carried in the exodus to the land (cf. Exodus 13:19). Now the Egyptian horses and chariots helped the procession; then they would oppose it (cf. Exodus 14:9, 17, 18, 26, 28). Now Israel's children were left behind; then they would join the exodus.

The fact that the whole company mourned at the "threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan" means that the funeral procession, for some unknown reason, took the long circuitous way around the bottom of the Dead Sea and up the east side of the Jordan – which is the same round-about way the Israelites would take four hundred years later under Moses' leadership. It was a proto-exodus, a dress rehearsal indeed!⁴

- 6) Consider the final words of Joseph recorded in the Bible (50:24, 25).

What does he say to his brothers?

What does he make them swear to do?

- 7) Look up Hebrews 11:22 and fill in the blank: "By _____, Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones."

Why was faith required for this? (see Hebrews 11:1)

8) Describe what takes place concerning Joseph’s bones in these verses:

- Exodus 13:17-21
- Joshua 24:32

A closer look: I smile every time I think of Moses retrieving the bones from the Egyptian coffin and having them carried around throughout the entire wilderness experience and entrance into the Promised Land. How incredible it must have been to witness those bones finally being laid to rest in the very place Joseph believed –*without ever seeing a single glimpse of it* - that his descendants would possess!

9) Like it or not, it’s time to write an epitaph for Joseph. Take your time with this one!

“Here lies Joseph, _____

_____.”

¹ Morris, Henry. *The Genesis Record – A Scientific and Devotional Commentary on the Book of Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 628.

² Mathews, Kenneth A. *Genesis 11:27–50:26*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 835–836.

³ Ryrie, *Ryrie Study Bible* Expanded Edition, New American Standard Version (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 27.

⁴ Hughes, *Genesis* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004), 567.