

עץ חיים

ETZ HAYIM

TORAH AND COMMENTARY

THE RABBINICAL ASSEMBLY
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²⁸Jacob lived seventeen years in the land of Egypt, so that the span of Jacob's life came to one hundred and forty-seven years. ²⁹And when the time approached for Israel to die, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, "Do me this favor, place your hand under my thigh as a pledge of your steadfast loyalty: please do not bury me in Egypt. ³⁰When I lie down with my fathers, take me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial-place." He replied, "I will do as you have spoken." ³¹And he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.

וַיְחִי יַעֲקֹב בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם שִׁבְעַת עָשָׂרָה שָׁנָה וַיְהִי יַמֵּי יַעֲקֹב שְׁנַיִם חִמָּוָה שָׁבַע שָׁנִים וְאַרְבָּעִים וּמֵאֵת שָׁנָה: ²⁹וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְמוֹת וַיִּקְרָא אֶל לְבָנָו לְיוֹסֵף וַיֹּאמֶר לוֹ אִם-נָא מִצָּאתַי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ שִׁים-נָא יָדְךָ תַּחַת יְרֵכִי וְעָשִׂיתָ עִמָּדִי חֶסֶד וְאַמֶּת אֶל-נָא תִקְבְּרֵנִי בְּמִצְרַיִם: ³⁰וְשִׁכַבְתִּי עִם-אֲבֹתַי וְנִשְׂאתָנִי מִמִּצְרַיִם וּקְבַרְתָּנִי בְּקַבְרֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אָנֹכִי אֲעֲשֶׂה כְּדַבְּרֶךָ: ³¹וַיֹּאמֶר הַשְּׁבַע לִי וַיִּשְׁבַּע לוֹ וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל-רֹאשׁ הַמֶּטֶה: פ

JACOB PREPARES FOR DEATH (47:28–48:22)

Jacob is aware that he will die outside the Land of Israel. Burial in his ancestral grave, in accordance with his wishes, will involve a major effort and elaborate arrangements, all of which must be carefully described.

28. seventeen years The Patriarch had thought that his time with Joseph would be brief. Instead, he has enjoyed many more years, precisely as many years as Joseph had lived with his father in Canaan (37:2). There was a similar pattern for Abraham, who lived exactly as many years in his father's home (12:4) as in the lifetime of his son Isaac (21:5, 25:7).

29. place your hand See Comment to 24:2.

do not bury me in Egypt Similarly, Joseph later requests of his brothers that they rebury him in the land of Canaan (50:25). The

deathbed requests are bound up with the divine promise of redemption and nationhood in the Land of Israel (48:21, 50:24ff.).

30. When I lie down with my fathers An idiomatic expression for death, not burial, and analogous to "going to one's fathers" or being "gathered to one's kin." See Comment to 15:15 and 25:8.

in their burial-place The cave of Machpelah.

31. Swear to me Jacob exacts this solemn oath, in addition to a promise, to bolster Joseph's position when he will request the royal authorization needed to fulfill the difficult task of reinterment.

bowed at the head of the bed The aged Patriarch, being an invalid, can make only some bodily gesture symbolic of bowing, either as a

This final *parashah* of Genesis brings to a close the age of the Patriarchs. Jacob dies after blessing his sons. Some years later, Joseph dies. Genesis ends on that note. In contrast, Exodus will not deal with a family, but with a nation.

The account of Jacob's death begins with "Jacob lived" (*va-y'hi*), from which the *parashah* derives its name. The achievements of Jacob's life are emphasized, not the fact of his death.

28. Jacob lived He spent his last years in honor and dignity, rather than simply waiting to die.

29. do me this favor We sense the poi-

gnancy of the role reversal, as an aging parent becomes dependent on his adult child.

steadfast loyalty In later Hebrew, the words for this phrase come to mean "true kindness" (*hesed v'emet*). Jewish tradition defines "true kindness" as a good deed for which no reciprocal favor can be anticipated, such as tending to the needs of the dead. Adherence to this sacred practice is one reason why the volunteer burial society in a community is known as *hevra kaddisha*, the sacred society.

do not bury me in Egypt For Jacob, as for many others, Egypt was a land of graves, domi-

48 Some time afterward, Joseph was told, “Your father is ill.” So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ²When Jacob was told, “Your son Joseph has come to see you,” Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

³And Jacob said to Joseph, “El Shaddai appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and He blessed me, ⁴and said to me, ‘I will make you fertile and numerous, making of you a community of peoples; and I will assign this

מח ויהי אחריו הדברים האלה ויאמר ליוסף הנה אביך חלה ויטח את־שני בניו עמו את־מנשה ואת־אפרים: ²ויגד ליעקב ויאמר הנה בנך יוסף בא אליך ויתחזק ישראל וישב על־המטה: ³ויאמר יעקב אל־יוסף אל שדי נראה־אלי בלז בארץ פנען ויברך אתי: ⁴ויאמר אלי הנני מפרך והרביתך ונתתיך לקהל עמים ונתתי את־הארץ

token of gratitude to Joseph or as an expression of thanks and praise to God.

EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH (48:1–20)

Joseph’s two sons are elevated to the status of Israelite tribes, retaining the number 12 for the landed tribes when Levi is not assigned any territory. Ephraim’s elevation in status over Manasseh reflects the political realities of later Israel.

THE ADOPTION (vv. 1–12)

1. Some time afterward That is, following the oath ceremony described in the preceding four verses and within the final year of Jacob’s life.

So he took with him The narrative leaves the destination and arrival to the reader’s imagination. The ancient Greek translation (Septuagint) adds, “He came to Jacob.”

2. sat up Out of respect for the office that Joseph represented.

3. El Shaddai See Comment to 17:1.

Luz This is the original name of Bethel according to 28:19. See chapter 35.

4. and said to me Jacob now establishes the legal basis for his subsequent actions. As heir to the blessings, Jacob has the sole right to decide who is to be included in the “community of peoples” that will be known as Israel. Only the one who receives the divine blessing directly has the right to bestow it on another. Hence, Jo-

nated by the pyramids and by the cult of the dead. Jacob fears that Egypt will become a graveyard for the vision and special purpose of the line of Abraham.

CHAPTER 48

1. Joseph was told, “Your father is ill.” Was Joseph too busy with his responsibilities to be aware of his father’s failing health? Or was he still ambivalent about his feelings toward his father? Or, as a *midrash* suggests, was he avoiding his father so that Jacob would not ask him how he came to be in Egypt in the first place (Pesik. R.)? The Talmud notes that Jacob is the first person in the Bible to be described as ill. Previously, the Sages imagine, people simply grew older and one day died. They picture Jacob praying for a sign about the number of his days,

so that he would have time to bless his children and grandchildren, reflect on the lessons of his life, and articulate his hopes and wishes for his family’s future (BT BM 87a).

2. Joseph has come to see you One should never enter the room of a sick or elderly person unannounced, lest they be embarrassed, indisposed, or not fit to receive visitors.

3–7. Jacob on his deathbed remembers two incidents from his long and full life: When he was young, God appeared to him and told him that he would become a special person; and Rachel, the woman he loved, died young. Ramban and Ibn Ezra understand the reference to Rachel’s burial on the road to Ephrath as an apology to Joseph for not having buried his mother in the family crypt at Machpelah. Jacob fears that Joseph, resenting the treatment of his mother, will not honor his own request to be

land to your offspring to come for an everlasting possession.’⁵ Now, your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine no less than Reuben and Simeon.⁶ But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be recorded instead of their brothers in their inheritance.⁷ I [do this because], when I was returning from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, while I was journeying in the land of Canaan, when still some distance short of Ephrath; and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath”—now Bethlehem.

⁸Noticing Joseph’s sons, Israel asked, “Who are these?”⁹ And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me here.” “Bring them up to me,” he said, “that I

הַנָּתַת לְזַרְעֲךָ אַחֲרַיִךְ אֶחְזֹת עֹלָם׃⁵ וְעַתָּה שְׁנֵי־בְנֶיךָ הַנוּלָדִים לְךָ בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד־בָּאִי אֵלַיךְ מִצְרַיִמָּה לִי־הֵם אֶפְרַיִם וּמְנַשֶּׁה פְּרָאִוֶּבֶן וְשִׁמְעוֹן יִהְיוּ־לִי׃⁶ וּמוֹלַדְתְּךָ אֲשֶׁר־הוֹלַדְתָּ אַחֲרֵיהֶם לָךְ יִהְיוּ עָלַי שֵׁם אֲחֵיהֶם יִקְרָאוּ בְּנֵי־לֶחֶם׃⁷ וְאֲנִי ׀ בְּבָאִי מִפְּדָן מֵתָה עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדַרְךָ בְּעוֹד כְּבַרְתָּ־אֶרֶץ לָבֵא אֶפְרַתָּה וְאֶקְבְּרָהָ שָׁם בְּדַרְךָ אֶפְרַת הוּא בֵּית לָחֶם׃

⁸ וַיֵּרָא יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶת־בְּנֵי יוֹסֵף וַיֹּסֶף וַיֹּאמֶר מִי־אֵלֶּה׃⁹ וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל־אָבִיו בְּנֵי הֵם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַן־לִי אֱלֹהִים בְּזֶה וַיֹּאמֶר קָח־ם

seph, who never experienced a divine revelation, cannot endow his sons with tribal territory.

an everlasting possession The only inalienable “possession” of territory is the Land of Israel. Only God can grant such a possession. Pharaoh’s gift is temporary.

5. shall be mine Jacob formally adopts his two grandchildren through a legal process that elevates them to full membership in the Israelite tribal league. The first stage of the process is this declaration of intent. Intrafamily adoptions are well attested in the ancient Near East.

Ephraim and Manasseh Jacob mentions the younger son first, in contrast to the order in verse 1—a hint of impending developments.

Reuben and Simeon The parallel drawn between the two sons of Joseph and the two oldest sons of Jacob marks the new legal status of the former.

6. born to you The verb *holad’ra* means, literally, “you have begotten.” The past tense of this verb is confirmed by the word meaning “who were born” (*ba-noladim*) in verse 5. It appears that we have here a fragment of a lost tradition, not otherwise referred to in the Bible, concerning other children born to Joseph, i.e., clans who adhered to the “House of Joseph.”

shall be yours They shall not constitute separate tribal entities, but shall share the inheritance of either Manasseh or Ephraim.

7. Rachel died On his deathbed, Jacob recalls his beloved wife, who died so young and for whom he endured so much.

Paddan The full place-name is Paddanaram, as in 25:20, 35:9.

8. Israel This name, rather than Jacob, is used hereafter until the end of the chapter to reflect the change of name (35:10) on which

buried in Machpelah. Sforno imagines Jacob pleading that he was too overcome with grief to make proper burial arrangements for Rachel, whom he loved so desperately, and stating that he has felt guilty about it ever since.

8. Who are these? Jacob, who has just spoken so extravagantly about his closeness to Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 5), does not recognize them. Has his vision begun to fail, as hap-

pened to his father, Isaac, in similar circumstances? Or did he fail to recognize Ephraim and Manasseh because, having been born and raised in Egypt, they were indistinguishable from Egyptian youths? Tradition has it that they reassured him by reciting the *Sh’ma*—“Hear, O Israel” (i.e., Jacob)—we may look like Egyptians but we affirm the same God as our father and grandfather.

may bless them.”¹⁰ Now Israel’s eyes were dim with age; he could not see. So [Joseph] brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹And Israel said to Joseph, “I never expected to see you again, and here God has let me see your children as well.”

¹²Joseph then removed them from his knees, and bowed low with his face to the ground. ¹³Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to Israel’s left—and Manasseh with his left hand—to Israel’s right—and brought them close to him. ¹⁴But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head—thus crossing his hands—although Manasseh was the first-born. ¹⁵And he blessed Joseph, saying, “The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—

this episode depends. Furthermore, the name Israel is more appropriate because the narrative concludes with tribal history.

10. Israel’s eyes The statement explains Joseph’s reaction in the following scene. He attributes his father’s unusual act to his impaired vision.

12. from his knees The knees of Jacob, on or between which the two boys were placed. This is another symbolic gesture that marks acceptance and legitimation as son and heir. See Comment to 30:3.

and bowed low The Hebrew verb is singular and refers to Joseph.

THE GRANDFATHER’S BLESSING

(vv. 13–16)

13. Joseph took the two of them Joseph positions the boys before their grandfather in such

14. crossing his hands Onkelos translates the verb for “crossing” (*sikkel*) as “acting wisely,” acting with *seikhel*, “good sense.” We are reminded of the lengths which Jacob himself went to in moving the patriarchal blessing from the older to the younger brother. Throughout

שני נא אלי ואברכם: ¹⁰ועיני ישראל כבדו
מזקן לא יוכל לראות ויגש אתם אליו
וישק להם ויחבק להם: ¹¹ויאמר
ישראל אל-יוסף ראה פניך לא פללתי
והנה הראה אתי אלהים גם את-זרעך:
¹²ויצא יוסף אתם מעם ברביו וישתחו
לאפיו ארצה: ¹³ויקח יוסף את-שניהם
את-אפרים בימינו משמאל ישראל
ואת-מנשה בשמאלו מימין ישראל
ויגש אליו: ¹⁴וישלח ישראל את-ימינו
וישט על-ראש אפרים והוא הצעיר
ואת-שמאלו על-ראש מנשה שכל את-
ידיו כי מנשה הבכור: ¹⁵ויברך את-יוסף
ויאמר
האלהים אשר התהלכו אבתי לפניו
אברהם ויצחק
האלהים הרעה אתי מעודי עד-היום
הזה:

a way as to ensure that Jacob’s right hand, the symbol of action and power, will naturally rest on Manasseh, the firstborn.

14. on Ephraim’s head Placing the hand on the head establishes physical contact between the parties to the blessing, heightening the sense of intimacy and communication.

15. he blessed Joseph The mention of Joseph is surprising because the blessing is directed entirely to the grandsons. The Septuagint reads “he blessed them,” and the Latin reads “the sons of Joseph.”

my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked Jacob, out of modesty, does not include himself.

my shepherd The image for the deity as a shepherd, common throughout ancient Near Eastern literature and found frequently in the Bible, expresses the idea of God as guide, provider, and protector (see Ps. 23).

the Torah, there is a preference for younger brothers over older ones. This is a way of saying that eminence is a function of individual character rather than birth order.

15. he blessed Joseph One blesses people best by blessing their children (*Zohar* I:227b).

¹⁶The Angel who has redeemed me from all harm—

Bless the lads.

In them may my name be recalled,

And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,

And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth.”

¹⁷When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. ¹⁸“Not so, Father,” Joseph said to his father, “for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head.” ¹⁹But his father objected, saying, “I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations.” ²⁰So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you shall Israel invoke blessings, saying: God make you like Ephraim

¹⁶הַמְלַאֲךָ הַגָּאֵל אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע

יְבָרְךָ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים

וַיִּקְרָא בָהֶם שְׁמִי

וְשֵׁם אָבֹתַי אַבְרָהָם וְיִצְחָק

וַיְדַגְּנוּ לְרֵב בְּקֶרֶב הָאָרֶץ:

¹⁷וַיִּרְא יוֹסֵף כִּי-יָשִׁית אָבִיו יָדַיִמִינוּ עַל-

רֹאשׁ אֶפְרַיִם וַיִּרַע בְּעֵינָיו וַיִּתְמַךְ יָד-אָבִיו

לְהַסִּיר אֶתְּהָ מֵעַל רֹאשׁ-אֶפְרַיִם עַל-רֹאשׁ

מְנַשֶּׁה: ¹⁸וַיֹּאמֶר יוֹסֵף אֶל-אָבִיו לֹא-כֵן

אָבִי כִי-זֶה הַבְּכֹר שֵׁם יְמִינְךָ עַל-רֹאשׁוֹ:

¹⁹וַיִּמָּאֵן אָבִיו וַיֹּאמֶר יָדְעֹתִי בְנִי יָדְעֹתִי

גַּם-הוּא יִהְיֶה-לְעַם וְגַם-הוּא יִגְדֹל

וְאוֹלָם אָחִיו הַקָּטָן יִגְדֹל מִמֶּנּוּ וְזָרְעוֹ

יִהְיֶה מְלֹא-הַגּוֹיִם: ²⁰וַיְבָרְכֵם בַּיּוֹם

הַהוּא לֵאמֹר בְּךָ יְבָרְךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר

16. In them may my name be recalled “May my name be perpetuated through Ephraim and Manasseh.” That is, may they ever be part of the Israelite tribal confederation, identifying themselves with the history, traditions, and values of their Patriarchs.

teeming multitudes At the start of the wilderness wandering period, Ephraim and Manasseh together will number 72,700 male adults (Num. 1:32–35); 40 years later, the figure will be 85,200 (Num. 26:28–37), exceeding the combined population of Reuben and Simeon.

REVERSAL OF SENIORITY (vv. 17–20)

17. he thought it wrong That is, to disre-

gard the status of the firstborn. He attributes the “error” to his father's failing eyesight (v. 10).

19. I know I know who is the real firstborn and how you placed your two sons before me.

shall be greater than he Moses' farewell address (Deut. 33:17) reflects the numerical superiority of Ephraim.

plentiful enough for nations Jacob transfers to Ephraim the contents of the blessing that he himself had received (48:4, 35:11).

20. he blessed them Jacob's blessing of Ephraim and Manasseh (v. 16), interrupted by Joseph, is now resumed.

Israel See Comment to 47:27.

16. In them may my name be recalled, / And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac May God bless them as long as they call themselves by traditional, biblical names. The most valuable legacy we can leave our children and grandchildren is bequeathing to them the faith that sustained us (Shneur Zalman of Lyady).

20. By you shall Israel invoke blessings To this day, Jewish parents bless their children on *Shabbat* eve, usually before *kiddush* or right after candle lighting). Before blessing all children with the priestly blessing (Num. 6:24–26), they bless their daughters, “May God make you as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah.” And they

and Manasseh.” Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

²¹Then Israel said to Joseph, “I am about to die; but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²²And now, I assign to you one portion more than to your brothers, which I wrested from the Amorites with my sword and bow.”

49 And Jacob called his sons and said, “Come together that I may tell you what is to befall you in days to come.

A GIFT TO JOSEPH (vv. 21–22)

21. I am about to die; but God will be with you These apparently unrelated clauses allude to the contrast between the present situation that permits Jacob to be buried in the Promised Land and the impending bondage in Egypt. Yet future redemption is ensured, because God wills it.

with you The Hebrew pronoun for “you” is in the plural. Jacob speaks through Joseph to the entire people.

22. one portion This translation of *sh'khem*, which agrees with many ancient versions, is accepted by traditional Jewish commentators. It means that Jacob is giving Joseph a double share, thus elevating him to the status of firstborn. It is likely, however, that *sh'khem* here

יְשַׁמְךָ אֱלֹהִים בְּאֶפְרַיִם וּבְמְנַשֶּׁה וַיִּשָּׂם
 אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם לְפָנַי מִנְּשֵׁה׃
 21 וַיֹּאמֶר יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־יוֹסֵף הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מֵת
 וְהִדָּה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהִשִּׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל־
 אֶרֶץ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם׃ 22 וַאֲנִי נָתַתִּי לְךָ שְׁכֶם
 אֶחָד עַל־אֲחֵיךָ אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד
 הָאֱמֹרִי בַחֶרֶב וּבִקְשָׁתִי׃ פ

מט רביעי וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאמֶר
 הֲאִסְפוּ וְאִגִּידָה לָכֶם אֶת אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא
 אֶתְכֶם בְּאַחֲרֵית הַיָּמִים׃

does not mean “portion” but is connected with the city of Shechem, a place closely associated with Jacob and Joseph (Gen. 33:18ff.; Josh. 24:32). In that understanding, the passage refers to some tradition in the life of Jacob (other than the one in chapter 34) concerning his participation in a war against Shechem, which the Bible has not otherwise preserved. The Book of Joshua contains no report of the conquest of that city, although Joshua delivered his farewell address and conducted a covenant ceremony there. It is likely, therefore, that there was a pre-Mosaic Israelite conquest of Shechem. Possibly the city was razed in such a conquest and remained largely in ruins until it was reoccupied by Joshua without a fight.

from the Amorites This is a generic name for the pre-Israelite peoples of Canaan.

THE TESTAMENT OF JACOB (49:1–33)

Jacob summons his sons to his bedside to hear his farewell words. He addresses each son individually in poetic form. Traditional Jewish commentators treated these blessings and curses as prophetic. Modern scholars view them as reflections of later historical reality.

A PROSE INTRODUCTION (v. 1)

1. called That is, he sent for his sons.

what is to befall you This refers to the distant future. Jacob is speaking to the individual tribes personified as his sons.

bless their sons, “May God make you as Ephraim and Manasseh.” Why Ephraim and Manasseh? Perhaps because they were the first children who had to maintain their identity in a foreign land. Or perhaps because they were the first brothers in the Bible to get along peaceably, after the conflicts that marred the lives of Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob

and Esau, and Joseph and his brothers. Now that siblings have learned to get along, the story of the Jewish people can move to the next stage.

CHAPTER 49

1. Jacob summons his children, promising to tell them what will happen to them in the future. Instead, he speaks to each of his sons

²Assemble and hearken, O sons of Jacob;
Hearken to Israel your father:

הַקְבְּצוּ וְשִׁמְעוּ בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב
וְשִׁמְעוּ אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיכֶם:

³Reuben, you are my first-born,
My might and first fruit of my vigor,
Exceeding in rank
And exceeding in honor.

רְאוּבֵן בְּכֹרִי אַתָּה
כֹּחִי וְרֵאשִׁית אוֹנִי
יִתֵּר שְׂאֵת
וְיִתֵּר עָז:

⁴Unstable as water, you shall excel no
longer;
For when you mounted your father's bed,
You brought disgrace—my couch he
mounted!

פָּחַז כַּמַּיִם אֶל־תוֹתֵר
כִּי עָלִית מִשְׁכְּבֵי אָבִיךָ
אָז חָלַלְתָּ יְצוּעֵי עֲלֶה: פ

in days to come The phrase *b'aharit ha-yamim* means simply “in the future,” a time without precise definition.

THE POEM (vv. 2–27)

2. *hearken . . . Hearken* The repetition of a word at the beginning of two parallel clauses is a feature of biblical Hebrew poetry.

REUBEN (vv. 3–4)

Reuben is censured for the flaws in his character and for his moral failing (see Comment to verse 4). Reuben's place at the head of the tribal lists in the Bible must echo the actual state of affairs that existed in dim antiquity. Behind Reuben's loss of his firstborn status is a legal reality during an early period of Israelite history when it still was possible for a father to annul the birthright of his firstborn son, in contrast to the later legislation of Deut. 21:15–17.

3. *My might* That is, “my virility.”

my vigor The Hebrew word *on* refers here to the powers of procreation.

Exceeding The literal meaning of the word translated as “exceeding” (*yeter*) is “excellence.”

The meaning: Being the firstborn, you should have pre-eminence over your brothers.

4. *Unstable as water* Jacob censures Reuben for acting irresponsibly and impetuously, with no moral restraint, just as a torrent of water rushes along wildly.

shall excel no longer You have lost your pre-eminence.

mounted . . . bed This refers to Reuben's act of incest, recorded in 35:22 and mentioned again in 1 Chron. 5:1.

bed The word translated here as “bed” (*mishk'vet*) is plural, always so used in the context of carnal relations (see Lev. 18:22, 20:13). Here the phrase “your father's bed” stands for “the bed of your father's wife.”

You brought disgrace The Hebrew stem חלל “to pollute, defile, profane,” is used in connection with sexual depravity, as in Lev. 19:29 and 21:9.

my couch he mounted This is an aside addressed to the assembled sons.

SIMEON AND LEVI (vv. 5–7)

These two brothers are strongly censured for acts of cruelty and violence, alluding to their attack

about that son's character and special gifts. The Midrash suggests that this is because the spirit of prophecy departed from Jacob (Gen. R. 98:2). Perhaps we are not meant to know the future lest it lead us to despair or complacency. Perhaps, when Jacob looked into the future, he saw the quarreling and bloodshed that would befall his descendants, and the spirit of prophecy cannot abide where there is grief and sadness (Naf-

tali of Ropshitz). The modern reader may understand the passage to mean that a person's future depends on his or her character. There is no preordained script that we are fated to follow.

4. *You brought disgrace* What sort of blessing is this? Perhaps the greatest blessing is to have someone who cares about you point out your faults.

5Simeon and Levi are a pair;
 Their weapons are tools of lawlessness.
 6Let not my person be included in their
 council,
 Let not my being be counted in their as-
 sembly.
 For when angry they slay men,
 And when pleased they maim oxen.
 7Cursed be their anger so fierce,
 And their wrath so relentless.
 I will divide them in Jacob,
 Scatter them in Israel.

שִׁמְעוֹן וְלֵוִי אֲחִים⁵
 כְּלֵי חַמְס מִכְרִיתֵיהֶם:
 בְּסֹדֶם אֶל־תִּבֵּא נַפְשִׁי⁶
 בְּקֹהֶלֶם אֶל־תִּחַד כְּבֹדִי
 כִּי בְאַפִּם הִרְגוּ אִישׁ
 וּבְרַצְנָם עָקְרוּ־שׁוֹר:
 אָרוּר אַפִּם כִּי עָוֹ⁷
 וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קָשְׁתָּהּ
 אַחֲלִקֶם בִּיעָקֵב
 וְאֶפְיָצֶם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל: ט

8You, O Judah, your brothers shall praise;
 Your hand shall be on the nape of your foes;

יְהוּדָה אַתָּה יִדְוֶךָ אֲחֵיךָ⁸
 יָדְךָ בְּעֵרְףֵי אִיְבֹיךָ

on the city of Shechem, described in chapter 34. Neither Levi nor Simeon, next in line of seniority after Reuben, inherited the mantle of leadership. Levi, next after Simeon, is here depicted as a war-like tribe, with no hint of the sacred status it would later have (Exod. 32:26ff.; Deut. 33:11). Very likely, these verses echo an early, independent tradition.

5. a pair The Hebrew word *ahim* literally means “brothers,” i.e., partners and allies.

Their weapons The Hebrew word translated as “their weapons” (*m’kheroteihem*) appears only here, and any translation is guesswork.

6. council . . . assembly The Hebrew for these words (*sod . . . kahal*) refer to the tribal gatherings at which decisions are made.

Let not my being Jacob dissociates himself from these two tribes because of their disregard for human values. The word translated here as “being” (*kavod*) means “presence,” as in “the Presence of the LORD” (*k’vod Adonai*). A derivative meaning is “honor.” It is the God-endowed quality that distinguishes human beings from other forms of life.

angry . . . pleased That is, in any mood, as the whim strikes them.

maim According to 34:28ff., the cattle in Shechem were not mutilated but carried off as spoil. Jacob’s reproach, therefore, may refer to some other acts of cruelty perpetrated by these two tribes, the record of which has not been preserved.

7. I will It is Jacob who pronounces their fate.

divide them These two tribes are cursed with the loss of independence and territorial integrity. The future condition of the tribes is explained in terms of the punitive ban decreed on their original ancestors.

JUDAH (vv. 8–12)

In striking contrast to Simeon and Levi, Judah is lavishly praised and blessed. The tribe of Judah attained leadership in the time of David, the period referred to in these verses.

8. You You alone, in contrast to the others.

hand . . . on the nape The enemies, turning their backs in flight, will be seized by the nape before they can escape.

your foes The tribe of Judah, constantly be-

5. Their weapons are tools of lawlessness The Midrash reads: “their weapons are stolen.” It was Esau who was ordained to live by the sword; Jacob and his descendants were to flourish through their piety. When Simeon and Levi

resorted to violence, they appropriated Esau’s method of dealing with conflict (Gen. R. 99:6).

7. Cursed be their anger Even in his displeasure, Jacob does not curse his sons; he curses their unacceptable behavior. A com-

Your father's sons shall bow low to you.
 9Judah is a lion's whelp;
 On prey, my son, have you grown.
 He crouches, lies down like a lion,
 Like the king of beasts—who dare rouse
 him?
 10The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
 Nor the ruler's staff from between his
 feet;
 So that tribute shall come to him
 And the homage of peoples be his.

11He tethers his ass to a vine,
 His ass's foal to a choice vine;
 He washes his garment in wine,
 His robe in blood of grapes.
 12His eyes are darker than wine;
 His teeth are whiter than milk.

יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְנֵי אָבִיךָ:
 9 גֹּר אַרְיֵה יְהוּדָה
 מִטְרֶף בְּנֵי עָלִית
 כָּרַע רֹבֵץ כְּאַרְיֵה
 וּכְלָבִיא מִי יִקְיָמוּנֻוּ:
 10 לֹא יִסּוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה
 וּמִחֻקֵּק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו
 עַד כִּי־יָבֵא שִׁילֹה שִׁילֹו
 לֹו יִקְהַת עַמִּים:

11 אֶסְרִי לֶאֱפֹן עִירָה עִירוֹ
 וְלִשְׂרָקָה בְּנֵי אֶתְנוֹ
 כֶּבֶס בִּיָּין לְבִשׁוֹ
 וּבָדָם־עֵנָבִים סוּתָה סוּתֹו:
 12 חִכְלִילֵי עֵינָיִם מִיָּין
 וּלְבָן־שָׁנִים מִחֶלֶב: פ

set by the Philistines to the west, Amalekites in the Negeb, and Edomites to the east, was for a long time isolated from the northern tribes by Canaanite enclaves and forced to expand southward.

9. a lion's whelp A metaphor of strength, daring, and invincibility.

have you grown An allusion to the later heroic and expansionist campaigns of David.

10. The scepter An emblem of sovereignty. Judah will always enjoy authority over the other tribes. From the tribe of Judah came the royal house of David.

from between his feet The phrase conjures up the picture of a ruler holding the staff of office between his legs when seated in formal session.

tribute shall come to him This translation understands the Hebrew word *shiloh* as a combination of *shai* (tribute) and *loh* (to him).

peoples Either the other tribes (i.e., “kinsmen”) or an allusion to foreign peoples conquered by David.

11. He tethers This is an exaggerated image of the fertility of the tribal territory of Judah.

choice vine The Hebrew word is “*sorekah*.” A place named Wadi Sorek, in the territory of Judah, is located in Timnah, a region rich in vineyards.

He washes his garment in wine Either this is another exaggerated image for the abundance of wine or it may poetically relate to the stained garments of those engaged in the manufacture of wine, as mentioned in Isa. 63:2ff.

blood of grapes A poetic term for wine.

12. darker than wine . . . whiter than milk The phrases express an ideal of beauty: sparkling eyes and shining white teeth.

mentator interprets his words to mean, “May they be unsuccessful in their anger and violence. May such behavior not prove effective, so that they not be encouraged to use it” (*Hizz-kuni*).

10. So that tribute shall come to him Sforno

understands *Shiloh* as related to *shalom*, so that the verse would mean “till the time of total peace arrives.” The Midrash and Rashi take the verse as a reference to the Messianic Era, when nations will pay tribute to the ruler from the seed of Judah.

13Zebulun shall dwell by the seashore;
He shall be a haven for ships,
And his flank shall rest on Sidon.

13 זְבוּלֹן לְחֹף יָמִים יִשְׁכֵּן
וְהוּא לְחֹף אֲנִיֹּת
וְיָרְכָתוּ עַל-צִידֹן: ס

14Issachar is a strong-boned ass,
Crouching among the sheepfolds.
15When he saw how good was security,
And how pleasant was the country,
He bent his shoulder to the burden,
And became a toiling serf.

14 וְיִשְׁשַׁבֵּר חֲמֹר גָּרָם
רֹבֵץ בֵּין הַמְשֻׁפְּתִים:
15 וַיִּרְא מְנַחָה כִּי טוֹב
וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ כִּי נְעֻמָּה
וַיֵּט שִׁכְמוֹ לְסָבֵל
וַיְהִי לְמַס־עֶבֶד: ס

16Dan shall govern his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.

16 דָּן יִדְיִן עַמּוֹ
כְּאֶחָד שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:

ZEBULUN (v. 13)

The usual order, Issachar–Zebulun, is here reversed, very likely reflecting a time when the tribe of Zebulun was in the ascendancy.

13. the seashore The Mediterranean.

Sidon A port city in Phoenicia, about 25 miles (40 km) north of Tyre. See 2 Sam. 24:6, according to which this was the northernmost limit of David’s empire.

ISSACHAR (vv. 14–15)

The tribe is not even mentioned in the list of Judg. 1, which indicates that it played an insignificant role in the conquest of the Land of Israel. Here it is chided for passively submitting to servitude as the price of peace with its Canaanite neighbors.

14. a strong-boned ass The idiom for this (*hamor gerem*) appears only here. This translation implies a criticism of the tribe for placing its strength at the service of the Canaanites.

Crouching among the sheepfolds That is, inactive, content to enjoy its safety at the expense of its freedom.

15. security The word *m’nuḥah* means “resting place” and is used here in the sense of “haven, settled home.”

good . . . pleasant The territory of the tribe lay in a fertile plateau in Lower Galilee.

to the burden . . . a toiling serf The verb *סבל* and the following word, *mas*, both refer to “corvée,” enforced hard labor imposed on a subservient people. These very terms are used that way in Akkadian documents from Syria and Canaan. It would seem that until the final overthrow of the Canaanite city-states in the time of Deborah, the tribe was content to perform corvée labor for the local overlords in return for a quiet existence.

DAN (v. 16–17)

Dan is the first of the tribes descended from concubines to be addressed. During the settlement period, it was a small tribe in a precarious position. All attempts on the part of the Danites to settle in their originally assigned territory were unsuccessful, and they migrated northward (see Judg. 18:1ff.). The testament of Jacob is referring either to the premigration period or to events after the settlement in the north.

16. shall govern The tribe of Dan will maintain its independence, despite its tribulations and failures.

the tribes of Israel This is the first use of the phrase.

13–14. There is a rabbinic tradition that members of the tribe of Zebulun were prosperous merchants who subsidized the members of the tribe of Issachar, enabling them to engage in study. Jacob gives precedence to Zebulun (another younger brother favored over an older one)

as a way of commending them for their actions (Gen. R. 99:9). Similarly, at the end of the Torah, Moses in his farewell address blesses “Zebulun in your excursions and Issachar in your tents” (Deut. 33:18).

17Dan shall be a serpent by the road,
A viper by the path,
That bites the horse's heels
So that his rider is thrown backward.

17 יְהִי־דָן נָחֵשׁ עַל־דֶּרֶךְ
שֹׁפֵיפֵן עַל־אֶרֶח
הַנֶּשֶׁף עֶקְבֵי־סוֹס
וַיִּפֹּל רֹכְבוֹ אָחוֹר:

18I wait for Your deliverance, O LORD!

18 לִישׁוּעָתָךְ קִוִּיתִי יְהוָה:

19Gad shall be raided by raiders,
But he shall raid at their heels.

19 גָּד גְּדוּר יִגְדְּבוּ

חמישי

וְהוּא יִגְדַּעֲקָב: ס

20Asher's bread shall be rich,
And he shall yield royal dainties.

20 מֵאֲשֵׁר שֶׁמֶנֶה לַחֲמוֹ

וְהוּא יִתֵּן מִעֲדֵי־מֶלֶךְ: ס

17. viper The image may allude to the form of guerrilla warfare to which the tribe of Dan was forced to resort in its struggle for survival against its neighbors during the period of settlement.

horse's . . . rider The word for “rider” (*ro-khev*) can also be used of a charioteer, as in Exod. 15:2 and Jer. 51:21. Hence the likely reference here is to Canaanite chariots, which for a long time constituted the primary obstacle to Israelite penetration into the lowlands and caused the migration of the Danites (Josh. 17:18; Judg. 1:19, 4:3).

A PRAYER (v. 18)

18. I wait for Your deliverance Most likely, this is a prayer invoked by Jacob for the tribe of Dan in its desperate struggle for a territorial foothold in the land of Canaan. It also could be a prayer uttered by Jacob who, in a sudden moment of weakness, calls for strength to finish the testament.

GAD (v. 19)

This tribe's territory was east of the Jordan. Gad was engaged in a series of wars with its neighbors—Ammonites, Moabites, and Arameans—for most of its history. No particular historic situation can be pinpointed as the background to this aphorism.

19. Gad . . . raided The Hebrew contains a play on the name: *Gad* is associated with *g'dud*,

“a troop,” and the verb formed from it, *y'gudenu*, “shall be raided.”

ASHER (v. 20)

This tribe settled in western Galilee between Carmel and Phoenicia (Josh. 19:24–31), an area famed for its fertility, and inside the Canaanite–Phoenician sphere of political and commercial activity. Asher, which did not succeed in capturing the most important cities in its allotted territory, seems to have thrown in its lot with the local city-states from which it derived its prosperity. The testament thus refers to the period of the Judges, before the final defeat of the Canaanites in the north under Deborah's leadership.

20. Asher The name, which means “fortune, happiness” (Gen. 30:13), contains an allusion to the prosperity of the tribe.

bread The word translated as “bread” (*le-chem*) can mean food in general. This is its meaning in Arabic, where it often refers to meat.

royal dainties The phrase may either be figurative, “delicacies fit for a king,” or literal—i.e., Asher serviced the petty Canaanite kingdoms with gifts of oil.

NAPHTALI (v. 21)

The territory of this tribe lay in Upper Galilee and ran parallel to the Jordan from the south shore of the Sea of Galilee to an unspecified line in the north beyond Lake Huleh, with its western boundary bordering on Asher (Josh.

17. This rather violent prediction about the tribe of Dan is commonly related to the career of Samson, a warlike leader who came from

that tribe. It may also refer to Dan's later relocation to the north when it was a border tribe.

²¹Naphtali is a hind let loose,
Which yields lovely fawns.

נִפְתָּלִי אֵילָה שְׁלֵחָה
הִנְתַּן אִמְרֵי שֹׁפָר: ס

²²Joseph is a wild ass,
A wild ass by a spring
—Wild colts on a hillside.

בֵּן פָּרֵת יוֹסֵף
בֵּן פָּרֵת עַל־עֵינַי
בְּנוֹת צִעְדָּה עַל־יְשׁוּר:

²³Archers bitterly assailed him;
They shot at him and harried him.

וַיִּמְרְרוּהוּ וּרְבוּ

²⁴Yet his bow stayed taut,
And his arms were made firm
By the hands of the Mighty One of Ja-
cob—

וַיִּשְׁטְמֵהוּ בְּעַלְי חֲצָיִם:

וַתִּשָּׁב בְּאֵיתָן קִשְׁתּוֹ

There, the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel—

וַיַּפְּזוּ זְרַעֵי יָדָיו

מִיַּדֵּי אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב

²⁵The God of your father who helps you,
And Shaddai who blesses you

מִשֵּׁם רֹעֵה אֲבִן יִשְׂרָאֵל:

מֵאֵל אָבִיךָ וַיַּעֲזֹרְךָ

With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that couches below,

וְאֵת שְׂדֵי וַיְבָרְכֶךָ

בְּרִכַּת שָׁמַיִם מֵעַל

בְּרִכַּת תְּהוֹם רַבְּצַת תַּחַת

19:32–39). It played a glorious role in the war against the Canaanites.

21. a hind The word *ayyalah*, a symbol of beauty, also typifies fleet-footedness.

let loose The literal meaning of the word *sh'luḥah* is “unrestrained.”

lovely fawns Perhaps a reference to the beauty, openness, and fruitfulness of its tribal territory.

JOSEPH (vv. 22–26)

Lavish blessing is showered upon Joseph in a passage of exceptional length, equaled only by that to Judah.

22. Joseph The name “Joseph” is here used for the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Such usage is rare. Normally, “Joseph” designates the entire northern kingdom of ancient Israel, and the two tribes are known as “the House of Joseph” or “the sons of Joseph.”

wild ass This may allude to the freedom and independence of the Joseph tribes, which occupied an area that had been sparsely populated (see Josh. 17:14–18).

23. Archers The Bible nowhere else records attacks by archers on Joseph. This may refer to some unreported episode in his life or to attacks on Ephraim and Manasseh by neighboring tribes or Canaanite armies.

24. his bow stayed taut Joseph remained

steadfast in the face of adversity and drew his strength from God, who championed his cause.

Mighty One of Jacob The phrase “*Avir Yaakov*” is a rare title for God. It corresponds to the Akkadian divine title *bel abari*, “endowed with strength.”

Jacob . . . Israel Do these refer to the Patriarch—or to the people Israel? The ambiguity is probably deliberate. The Patriarch and the people are now as one.

There The Hebrew vocalization *mi-sham* (literally, “from there”) may be a scribal error for the word *mi-shem* (literally, “by the name of”).

the Shepherd For the image of God as a shepherd, see Comment to 48:15.

the Rock of Israel This image expresses strength, permanence, and protection.

25. The God of your father This title stresses the continuity of the generations, the unbroken chain of religious tradition that alone makes the dying Patriarch’s blessing meaningful and effective. The testament to Joseph now shifts from the miseries of the past to the promise of the future.

blessings These consist of rain and dew and abundance of water resources, all of which symbolize fruitfulness of the soil and the fecundity of animals and humans.

the deep that couches below The Hebrew word translated as “the deep” (*t’hom*) refers to

Blessings of the breast and womb.
 26 The blessings of your father
 Surpass the blessings of my ancestors,
 To the utmost bounds of the eternal hills.
 May they rest on the head of Joseph,
 On the brow of the elect of his brothers.

בְּרַכַּת שְׁדַיִם וְרֵחַם:
 26 בְּרַכַּת אָבִיךָ
 גְּבֹרוּ עַל-בְּרַכַּת הוֹרֵי
 עַד-תְּאוֹת גְּבֻעַת עוֹלָם
 תְּהִינָן לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף
 וּלְקַדְקֹד נְזִיר אֶחָיו: פ

27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
 In the morning he consumes the foe,
 And in the evening he divides the spoil.”

ששי
 27 בְּנִימִין זֶאֵב יִטְרֹף
 בַּבֶּקֶר יֹאכַל עֵד
 וּלְעֶרֶב יַחֲלַק שְׁלָל:

28 All these were the tribes of Israel, twelve in number, and this is what their father said to them as he bade them farewell, addressing to each a parting word appropriate to him.

28 כָּל-אֵלֶּה שְׁבֵטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר
 וְזֹאת אֲשֶׁר-דִּבֶּר לָהֶם אָבִיהֶם וַיְבָרֶךְ
 אוֹתָם אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר כִּבְרַכְתּוּ בִּרְךָ אֹתָם:
 29 וַיֵּצֵאוּ אוֹתָם וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם אֲנִי נֹאֲסָף
 אֶל-עַמִּי קִבְרוּ אֹתִי אֶל-אֲבֹתַי אֶל-

29 Then he instructed them, saying to them,
 “I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me

the ancient notion of the subterranean source of uncontrollable waters that rise to the earth's surface (see Gen. 1:2).

26. Surpass Joseph is assured that the blessings he is receiving from his father exceed the blessings his father received from his own forebears.

BENJAMIN (v. 27)

The image of Benjamin as a warrior and a predator is that of a tribe, not an individual. The belligerence of the Benjaminites resulted from their geographic situation: a narrow strip of land so strategically located that the important north–south central highway, as well as a main east–west road leading to Transjordan, passed through it. As a result, the territory of Benjamin became an arena for wars. The testament of Jacob reflects this general historical situation. (See the anti-Benjamin war in Judg. 20–21.)

27. morning . . . evening The two contrasting terms express continual action. They could also describe the wolf as prowling among the

sheep at night, snatching its prey and returning to its lair to share it with its young, with enough left over for the morning.

PROSE EPILOGUE: THE DEATH OF JACOB (vv. 28–33)

28. the tribes of Israel See Comment to verse 16. The phrase expresses the collective awareness of a national unity and common identity that is “Israel,” even though each tribe is individually addressed in the testament and regarded as an autonomous entity.

twelve in number This is the first reference in the Bible to the 12 tribes of Israel, a number that is maintained in all tribal lists.

as he bade them farewell The Hebrew verb *va-y'varekh*, usually understood as “bless,” here is rendered “bade farewell” because not all the tribes received blessings.

29. Bury me Jacob imposes on all his sons the obligation to bury him in Canaan, but he does not make them swear to that effect, as he did with Joseph (47:29–31), because only Jo-

25. blessings of heaven above, / Blessings of the deep that couches below Some of Joseph's remarkable achievements came about because he was fortunate to be blessed with good quali-

ties from birth (“blessings of heaven above”). At the same time, he encountered chaos and misfortune (“the deep that couches below”) and overcame them.

with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,³⁰ the cave which is in the field of Machpelah, facing Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site—³¹there Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried; there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried; and there I buried Leah—³²the field and the cave in it, bought from the Hittites.”³³When Jacob finished his instructions to his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and, breathing his last, he was gathered to his people.

50 Joseph flung himself upon his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. ²Then Joseph ordered the physicians in his service to embalm his father, and the physicians em-

seph had the capability, and access to the Egyptian authorities, necessary to implement the Patriarch's wish.

הַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשְּׂדֵה עֶפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי:
 30 בַּמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר בַּשְּׂדֵה הַמְּכַפְלָה אֲשֶׁר
 עַל־פְּנֵי־מַמְרָא בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵעַן אֲשֶׁר קָנָה
 אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשְּׂדֵה מֵאֵת עֶפְרוֹן הַחִתִּי
 לְאַחֲזֹת־קֶבֶר: 31 שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ אֶת־
 אַבְרָהָם וְאֵת שָׂרָה אִשְׁתּוֹ שָׁמָּה קָבְרוּ
 אֶת־יִצְחָק וְאֵת רִבְקָה אִשְׁתּוֹ וְשָׁמָּה
 קָבַרְתִּי אֶת־לֵאָה: 32 מְקַנָּה הַשְּׂדֵה
 וְהַמְעָרָה אֲשֶׁר־בּוֹ מֵאֵת בְּנֵי־חֵת: 33 וַיִּכְבֵּל
 יַעֲקֹב לְצִוּוֹת אֶת־בָּנָיו וַיֹּאסֶף רַגְלָיו אֶל־
 הַמֶּטֶה וַיִּגְוַע וַיֹּאסֶף אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ:

ו וַיִּפֹּל יוֹסֵף עַל־פְּנֵי אָבִיו וַיִּבֶךְ עָלָיו
 וַיִּשְׁקֵלּוּ: 2 וַיִּצַּו יוֹסֵף אֶת־עַבְדָּיו אֶת־
 הַרְפָּאִים לְחַנֵּט אֶת־אָבִיו וַיַּחְנְטוּ

30. the cave The description of the burial site follows that of 23:17–20.

33. he drew his feet into the bed A figurative expression for dying.

MOURNING AND BURIAL (50:1–14)

1. Joseph flung himself upon his father's face The usual phrase for such an emotional embrace is “to fall on the neck,” but this would be appropriate only when the parties involved are in an upright position.

and kissed him An act of farewell. See Gen. 31:28, 32:1 and Ruth 1:9,14.

2. the physicians in his service The text dissociates the embalming procedure from any

connection with pagan rites by having Joseph entrust the task to his own physicians and not to professional mortuary priests.

to embalm his father Joseph, too, was embalmed at death (v. 26). Such a practice is never again referred to in the Bible. It is well known that mummification was bound up with the Egyptian worship of Osiris and conceptions of the afterlife. The embalming of Jacob and Jo-

33. he drew his feet into the bed Jacob is described as “lifting his feet” to begin his journey after his dream of the ladder at Bethel (see Comment to 29:1). His journey will have taken him to three countries. He has loved, he has fought, he has known bereavement. Now, after many years, Jacob can finally stop wandering and struggling. We may see Jacob as perhaps the most fascinating of the Patriarchs. He is many different people in the course of a long and

eventful life. He grows and changes over the years, from the “mild man” (Gen. 25:27) who stays home, to Jacob the trickster who deceives and is deceived, and finally to Israel the mortal who struggles with God. He spends much of the last part of his life burdened by grief and perhaps guilt, ending his days as an old man who is dependent on his favorite son. We can see him as the exemplar of the flawed person who can outgrow his flaws. He seeks contentment and

balmed Israel. ³It required forty days, for such is the full period of embalming. The Egyptians bewailed him seventy days; ⁴and when the wailing period was over, Joseph spoke to Pharaoh's court, saying, "Do me this favor, and lay this appeal before Pharaoh: ⁵'My father made me swear, saying, "I am about to die. Be sure to bury me in the grave which I made ready for myself in the land of Canaan." Now, therefore, let me go up and bury my father; then I shall return."⁶ And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you promise on oath."

⁷So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the officials of Pharaoh, the senior members of his court, and all of Egypt's dignitaries, ⁸together with all of Joseph's household, his brothers, and his father's household; only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the region of

הַרְפָּאִים אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל: ³וַיִּמְלְאוּ־לוֹ אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם כִּי בֵן יִמְלָאוּ יְמֵי הַחֲנֻטִּים וַיִּבְכוּ אֹתוֹ מִצָּרִים שִׁבְעִים יוֹם: ⁴וַיַּעֲבְרוּ יְמֵי בְכִיתוֹ וַיְדַבֵּר יוֹסֵף אֶל־בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לֵאמֹר אִם־נָא מִצָּאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֵיכֶם דַּבְּרוּ־נָא בְּאָזְנֵי פַרְעֹה לֵאמֹר: ⁵אָבִי הִשְׁבִּיעַנִי לֵאמֹר הִנֵּה אָנֹכִי מֵת בְּקִבְרִי אֲשֶׁר כָּרַיתִי לִי בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן שָׁמָּה תִקְבְּרֵנִי וְעַתָּה אֶעֱלֶה־נָּא וְאֶקְבְּרָה אֶת־אָבִי וְאֲשׁוּבָה: ⁶וַיֹּאמֶר פַּרְעֹה עֲלֶה וּקְבֹר אֶת־אָבִיךָ כַּאֲשֶׁר הִשְׁבִּיעָךָ: ⁷וַיַּעַל יוֹסֵף לְקַבֵּר אֶת־אָבִיו וַיַּעֲלוּ אִתּוֹ כָּל־עַבְדָּי פַּרְעֹה וְקָנִי בֵיתוֹ וְכָל זְקֵנֵי אֶרֶץ־מִצְרָיִם: ⁸וְכָל בֵּית יוֹסֵף וְאָחָיו וּבֵית אָבִיו וְכָל טַפָּם וְצֹאֲנָם וּבְקָרָם עֲזֹבוּ

seph, however, was a purely practical measure, for Jacob is to be buried far from his place of death, and Joseph is to be reinterred many years later (v. 25).

3. forty days . . . seventy days Embalming required 40 days, followed by another 30 days of mourning.

4. the wailing period That is, the period fixed by convention.

to Pharaoh's court Joseph does not ap-

proach the king directly, probably because a mourner, regarded as unclean, was not permitted into the presence of Pharaoh.

5. I made ready From the verb *kariti*, "I dug" or "I purchased." In 2 Chron. 16:14, the Hebrew stem *כרה* has the sense of "to prepare a grave in advance."

7. all the officials of Pharaoh The elite of the court and the government participate in the funeral procession.

never succeeds in finding it because there is always one more challenge to be overcome. To be a Jew is to be a descendant of Jacob/Israel.

CHAPTER 50

4. lay this appeal before Pharaoh Was Joseph concerned that Pharaoh would not let him leave the country to bury his father? Is that why

he emphasizes the solemnity of his father's deathbed oath and refers to "the grave (he) made ready" (which must have been a telling argument in the land of the pyramids)? Did the large delegation of horsemen and chariots accompany Joseph to protect and honor him or to ensure that he would return from Canaan? And is that why the children and flocks remained behind? Joseph may have been a promi-

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

50:2 embalm Rabbinic authorities forbade embalming as an indignity to the dead (*nivvul ha-met*) and an infringement on the honor due the dead (*k'vod ha-met*). However, when civil law requires it or when it is necessary to protect the body from offensive odors while being moved long distances for burial, means necessary to preserve the body may be permitted.

Goshen. ⁹Chariots, too, and horsemen went up with him; it was a very large troop.

¹⁰When they came to Goren ha-Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and solemn lamentation; and he observed a mourning period of seven days for his father.

¹¹And when the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning at Goren ha-Atad, they said, "This is a solemn mourning on the part of the Egyptians." That is why it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

¹²Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. ¹³His sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham had bought for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. ¹⁴After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

¹⁵When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph still

9. Chariots The charioteers, not usually depicted in Egyptian tomb paintings of such events, are most likely present for security reasons, because the burial is to take place beyond the borders of the land.

10. Goren ha-Atad Probably Tell el-Ajjul (Beth Eglaim), situated 4.5 miles (7 km) southwest of Gaza on the eastern Mediterranean coast. A little to the south of the town lies a Late Bronze Age cemetery, which was a burial ground for high-ranking Egyptians serving in

בְּאֶרֶץ גֹּשֶׁן: ⁹וַיַּעַל עִמּוֹ גַם־רֶכֶב גַּם־פָּרָשִׁים וַיְהִי הַמַּחֲנֶה כְּבֹד מְאֹד:

¹⁰וַיָּבֹאוּ עַד־גֹּרֵן הָאֲטָד אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן וַיִּסְפְּדוּ־שָׁם מִסֹּפֶד גָּדוֹל וְכָבֵד מְאֹד וַיַּעַשׂ לְאָבִיו אָבֵל שִׁבְעַת יָמִים:

¹¹וַיֵּרָא וַיֹּשֶׁב הָאֶרֶץ הַכְּנַעֲנִי אֶת־הָאָבֵל בְּגִלְוֹן הָאֲטָד וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲבֵל־כְּבֹד זֶה לְמִצְרַיִם עַל־כֵּן קָרָא שְׁמָהּ אָבֵל מִצְרַיִם

אֲשֶׁר בְּעֵבֶר הַיַּרְדֵּן: ¹²וַיַּעֲשׂוּ בָנָיו לּוֹ כֵּן כַּאֲשֶׁר צִוָּם: ¹³וַיִּשְׂאוּ אֹתוֹ בָּנָיו אֶרְצָה

כְּנַעַן וַיִּקְבְּרוּ אֹתוֹ בַּמַּעֲרַת שְׂדֵה הַמְּכַפְּלָה אֲשֶׁר קָנָה אַבְרָהָם אֶת־הַשְּׂדֵה לְאַחֲזֹת־קֶבֶר מֵאֵת עֶפְרָן הַחִתִּי

עַל־פְּנֵי מְמָרָא: ¹⁴וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף יוֹסֵף מִצְרַיִמָּה הוּא וְאָחָיו וְכָל־הָעֲלִים אֹתוֹ לְקַבֵּר אֶת־אָבִיו אַחֲרֵי קִבְרוֹ אֶת־אָבִיו:

¹⁵וַיֵּרָאוּ אַחֲרֵי־יוֹסֵף כִּי־יָמַת אָבִיהֶם וַיֹּאמְרוּ לּוֹ יִשְׁטַמְנוּ יוֹסֵף וְהָשִׁב יוֹשִׁיב

Canaan and for Egyptianized Canaanite rulers and dignitaries. That would explain why the cortege halted at Abel-mizraim for public homage to Jacob in his own country.

seven days An ancient custom found as far back as one of the earliest of writings, the *Gilgamesh* epic.

13. His sons carried him The brothers participated in the fulfillment of their father's last request (49:29–32) by completing the final segment of the journey to Hebron.

JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS: THE FINALE (50:15–21)

Death has removed the commanding presence of the Patriarch. Family cohesion disintegrates as the brothers wait for Joseph to take revenge for the crime they committed against him.

15. When Joseph's brothers saw When the

reality of the situation struck them on their return to Egypt.

What if The brothers tell each other, "If Joseph should harbor a grudge, what would become of us?"

nent and powerful official in Egypt, but if he was not free to leave the country, we may sense that the enslavement of Jacob's children, the children of Israel, has begun.

10. seven days From this we see that the Jewish mourning tradition of *shiv'ah* (literally, seven) has ancient roots.

15. When Joseph's brothers saw According

bears a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrong that we did him!"¹⁶ So they sent this message to Joseph, "Before his death your father left this instruction:¹⁷ So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly.' Therefore, please forgive the offense of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph was in tears as they spoke to him.

¹⁸His brothers went to him themselves, flung themselves before him, and said, "We are prepared to be your slaves."¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Have no fear! Am I a substitute for God?²⁰ Besides, although you intended me harm, God intended it for good, so as to bring about the present result—the survival of many people.²¹ And so, fear not. I will sustain you and your children." Thus he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

²²So Joseph and his father's household remained in Egypt. Joseph lived one hundred

לָנוּ אֶת כָּל־הָרָעָה אֲשֶׁר גָּמְלָנוּ אֹתוֹ: ¹⁶וַיִּצְווּ אֶל־יוֹסֵף לֵאמֹר אֲבִיךָ צִוָּה לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ לֵאמֹר: ¹⁷כֹּה־תֹאמְרוּ לְיוֹסֵף אָנָּה שָׂא נָא פֶשַׁע אַחִיךָ וְחַטָּאתָם בִּי־רָעָה גְמִלוֹךְ וְעַתָּה שָׂא נָא לִפְשַׁע עַבְדֵי אֱלֹהֵי אֲבִיךָ וַיִּבְךְ יוֹסֵף בְּדַבְרָם אֵלָיו:

¹⁸וַיֵּלְכוּ גַם־אֶחָיו וַיִּפְּלוּ לִפְנָיו וַיֹּאמְרוּ הִנְנּוּ לְךָ לַעֲבָדִים: ¹⁹וַיֹּאמֶר אֲלֵהֶם יוֹסֵף אֶל־תִּירְאוּ כִּי הִתַּחַת אֱלֹהִים אָנִי: ²⁰וְאַתֶּם חֲשַׁבְתֶּם עָלַי רָעָה בְּיוֹם הַזֶּה חֲשַׁבָה לְטוֹבָה לִמְעַן עֲשֶׂה בְיוֹם הַזֶּה אֲנִי אֶכְלָל אֶתְכֶם וְאֶת־טַפְכֶם וַיִּנַּחֵם אוֹתָם וַיְדַבֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם:

²²וַיֵּשֶׁב יוֹסֵף בְּמִצְרַיִם הוּא וּבֵית אָבִיו

16. they sent this message Rather than risk a personal confrontation, the brothers send Joseph a message through a third party.

17. God of your father As Abravanel observes, they do not appeal to the claim of brotherliness because they forfeited it by their own actions. Hence they appeal to Joseph's respect and love for his father and to the religion that unites them all.

18. His brothers went to him When they

learn of Joseph's emotional reaction they feel free to approach him in person.

19. Have no fear Their anxiety is eased at once. Joseph has no interest in seeking revenge; the very idea offends him.

Am I a substitute for God Human beings dare not usurp the prerogative of God, who alone has the right of punitive retaliation (see Lev. 19:18).

22. one hundred and ten years This was

to a *midrash*, when Jacob's body was brought to Hebron for burial, the brothers saw Joseph make a side trip to the pit into which he had been thrown as a child. Joseph went there to reflect on the wondrous deliverance he had experienced since that day, but the brothers feared that he was harboring thoughts of revenge (Tanḥ. 17).

16. Before his death We have no reason to believe that Jacob ever learned the truth about how Joseph came to Egypt. If he had, would he not have rebuked them for what they did, as he rebuked Reuben, Simeon, and Levi? Joseph weeps (v. 17) at the discovery that his brothers

still do not trust him. Although the brothers might have justified their invention as a white lie in the interests of family peace, even as God misquoted Sarah's words to spare Abraham's feelings (Gen. 18:12–13), their situation is different. They shaded the truth not to spare another's feelings but to protect themselves from the possible consequences of what they had done (Gen. R. 100:8).

21. I will sustain you This can be seen as the brothers' ultimate punishment. Having hated Joseph for his dreams of lording it over them, they will now depend on him for their daily bread.

and ten years.²³ Joseph lived to see children of the third generation of Ephraim; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were likewise born upon Joseph's knees.²⁴ At length, Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. God will surely take notice of you and bring you up from this land to the land that He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."²⁵ So Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "When God has taken notice of you, you shall carry up my bones from here."

מפטיר ויחי יוסף מאה ועשר שנים: ²³ וירא יוסף לאפרים בני שלשים* גם בני מכיר בן-מנשה ילדו על-ברכי יוסף: ²⁴ ויאמר יוסף אל-אחיו אנכי מת ואלהים פקד יפקד אתכם והעלה אתכם מן-הארץ הזאת אל-הארץ אשר נשבע לאברהם ליצחק וליעקב: ²⁵ וישבע יוסף את-בני ישראל לאמר פקד יפקד אלהים אתכם והעלתם את-עצמתי מזה:

v. 23. ם רבתי לפי מהדורת לעטעריס

regarded as the ideal life span in ancient Egypt. In Israel it seems to have been 120 years.

23. children of Machir Machir, the most important of the clans of Manasseh, at one time was identified with the tribe as a whole.

24. his brothers "Brothers" here has the same sense as "sons of Israel" in the next verse.

God will surely take notice of you This profession of faith, made 54 years after Jacob's death, seems to carry with it resonances of a serious deterioration in the circumstances of the Israelites in Egypt. The repetition of the statement in verse 25 heightens its importance. It is used as a rallying cry in Exod. 3:16 when Moses appears as the national savior.

Abraham . . . Isaac . . . Jacob This clustering of the three Patriarchs for the first time sets the pattern for all such subsequent citations in the Torah, which are invariably in a context of the divine promises of national territory for the people Israel.

25. you shall carry up my bones Why Joseph does not request immediate interment in the land of his fathers is not explained; no doubt he knows that present conditions are unfavorable. The oath he extracts was carried out at the time of the Exodus (reported in Exod. 13:19) and he is laid to rest in a plot of land that Jacob once bought in Shechem (see Josh. 24:32; Gen. 33:19).

26. Looking back at Joseph's long and full life, what are we to make of it? On the surface, it was crowned with success. His childhood dream of having his father and brothers bow down to him was fulfilled. He came to know wealth and power and the satisfaction of having saved many people's lives. At the same time, though, his success frequently provoked jealousy and resentment, from his brothers and from the Egyptians who had to sell themselves into serfdom for food. He prospered as an Israelite in a foreign land, but to what extent did he have to compromise his Israelite identity in the process? Jewish tradition will speak of him as Joseph the *tzaddik*, the righteous one, because

of his moral restraint with Potiphar's wife and his foregoing revenge against his brothers. Our evaluation may be more ambivalent.

a coffin in Egypt The last words of the Book of Genesis, "a coffin in Egypt," foreshadow the events of the opening chapter of Exodus, the enslavement of the Hebrews, the killing of the Hebrew babies, and the birth of Moses who will be placed in a coffin-like basket on the Nile. The last words in each of the five books of the Torah, "Egypt, journeys, Sinai, Jericho, Israel," are a virtual summary of the Torah's narrative about the people Israel, from slavery to Sinai to the Promised Land.

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

50:25 swear The last wishes of the dying must be obeyed as long as they do not contravene Jewish law. Deathbed instructions have the same force as a legal contract duly delivered under Jewish law (BT Git. 13a).

²⁶Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

26 וַיָּמָת יוֹסֵף בְּן־מֵאָה וָעֶשֶׂר שָׁנִים
וַיַּחַנְטוּ אֹתוֹ וַיִּשְׂם בְּאֲרוֹן בְּמִצְרַיִם: *
26. v. למדינהאי סבום הפסוקים של הספר 1,534 וחציו 27:40

חֹזֶק חֹזֶק וְנִתְחַזַּק

26. a coffin The use of a coffin is uniquely Egyptian and is never again mentioned in the Bible. In sharp contrast to the honors accorded Jacob, no ritual or time of mourning is recorded

with the death of Joseph. The formative period in the history of ancient Israel has come to an end.

HALAKHAH L'MA-ASEH

50:26 Joseph died In accordance with Prov. 10:7, we say of an individual we remember with love and respect, "May his or her memory be a blessing": *Zikhrone/Zikhroneh livrahah*.

הַפְּטָרָה וַיְחִי

HAFTARAH FOR VA-Y'HI

1 KINGS 2:1–12

This *haftarah* contains David's last will and testament to Solomon. The dying king instructs his son and heir about the religious and political pursuits he should follow to be successful (1 Kings 2:1–4, 5–9). A concluding note states that Solomon's sovereignty was well established (v. 12), even though he had not yet carried out the ruthless acts advised by his father (cf. 2:28–35).

David died in ca. 965 B.C.E. The David portrayed here is both a pious believer in the Law and a shrewd politician who knows what it will take to secure Solomon's throne, which had just been won through intrigue and duplicity (1 Kings 1).

The aged King David speaks to Solomon in the language of religious rhetoric. The pious speech artfully attributed to him is also reflected in the high style of his learned language. This is illustrated, for example, by citations ("as recorded in the Teaching of Moses," 1 Kings 2:3) and by motivation clauses (introduced by *l'maan*, "in order that," vv. 3–4; see Deut. 4:1, 5, 5:16). David, a man of the Covenant, fully versed in the language of Torah, urges Solomon to obey its precepts.

The tone and content of the political section of David's directives, by contrast, is less polished and more in tune with realpolitik. David's advice to his son is based on personal considerations, and the language he uses recalls private grudges and other matters that the dying king wants his son to know, taking him into his confidence. The king's tactics are crafty. He simultaneously colludes with Solomon (saying "you know," vv. 5, 9), appeals to his son's pride and cleverness ("your wisdom," "for you are . . . wise," vv. 6, 9), and lets him know that death in Sheol is the only way to treat dangerous rivals (vv. 6, 9). Moreover, knowing that his son will understand the hint contained in his comment that "I swore" that "I

will not put [Shimei] to the sword," David can die in peace knowing that Solomon will attend to unsavory tasks that David has left for him. And this he does, through the agency of Benaiah (2:46). Significantly, the narrator's remark about the security of Solomon's throne in 1 Kings 2:12 recurs in verse 46, just after the murder of Shimei.

RELATION OF THE HAFTARAH TO THE PARASHAH

The *parashah* and the *haftarah* both deal with the approaching death of a leader (Jacob and David) and with a final pronouncement delivered to his son(s) (the 12 sons of Jacob, and Solomon). Both episodes begin alike, with the phrase "When [Jacob's/David's] life was drawing to a close" (*va-yikr'vu y'mei . . . lamut*). The technical term "he instructed" (*va-y'tzav*) also occurs in both instances (Gen. 49:29; 1 Kings 2:1), leading to the final instructions. Jacob requests that he be buried in the family tomb in the cave of Machpelah (Gen. 49:29–32), a request that subsequently is fulfilled (50:12–13).

Joseph's brothers, fearing that he would take revenge because they had sold him into servitude, "sent this message" (*va-y'izavvu*). "Before his death your father left this instruction (*tzivvah*): So shall you say to Joseph, 'Forgive, I urge you, the offense and guilt of your brothers who treated you so harshly'" (Gen. 50:16–17). Whether this was true or concocted, Joseph accepts their testimony and assures them of his good intentions (50:19–21).

Jacob's final request of his sons in the *parashah* repeats the more personal account made to Joseph alone (Gen. 47:29). It is here that the full moral force of being an agent for the dead is articulated. After supplicating the son, the father refers to the burial in Canaan as an act of "stead-

fast loyalty” (*hesed v’emet*). More particularly, it is best understood as an act of gratuitous kindness (*hesed shel emet*; Gen. R. 96:5).

The agency of Solomon in fulfilling David’s last will is more complicated. For David’s requests do not involve what a person never could do for himself (burial), but that which he intentionally delegates. In an effort to give the act of agency moral and legal force, rabbinic tradition

articulated the overall principle that “the agent of a person is as himself” (BT Kid. 41b). But in a further attempt to eliminate the double evasion of responsibility, they further stated that “there is no agent for enacting a sin” (BT Kid. 42b). From this perspective, David is culpable for the deaths of Joab and Shimei. Unlike Joseph, he is not magnanimous, but reaches beyond the grave to strike at his enemies.

2 When David’s life was drawing to a close, he instructed his son Solomon as follows: ²“I am going the way of all the earth; be strong and show yourself a man. ³Keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in His ways and following His laws, His commandments, His rules, and His admonitions as recorded in the Teaching of Moses, in order that you may succeed in whatever you undertake and wherever you turn. ⁴Then the LORD will fulfill the promise that He made concerning me: ‘If your descendants are scrupulous in their conduct, and walk before Me faithfully, with all their heart and soul, your line on the throne of Israel shall never end!’

⁵“Further, you know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s forces, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether: he killed them, shedding blood of war in peacetime, staining the girdle of his loins and the sandals on his feet

ב וַיִּקְרְבוּ יְמֵי־דָוִד לָמוּת וַיִּצְוֶה אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה בְנוֹ לֵאמֹר: ²אֲנִכִּי הִלֵּךְ בְּדַרְךְךָ כְּלֵה־אֶרֶץ וְחֻזְקָתָ וְהֵייתָ לְאִישׁ: ³וְשָׁמַרְתָּ אֶת־מִשְׁמֶרֶת הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו לְשָׁמֵר חֻקֹּתָיו מִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וְעֲדוּתָיו כִּפְתוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה לְמַעַן תִּשְׁכַּל אֶת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה וְאֵת כָּל־אֲשֶׁר תִּפְנֶה שָׁם: ⁴לְמַעַן יִקָּים יְהוָה אֶת־דְּבָרוֹ אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר עָלַי לֵאמֹר אִם־יִשְׁמְרוּ בְנֵיךָ אֶת־דִּרְכֹּם לְלַכֵּת לִפְנֵי בְּאֻמֹּת בְּכָל־לְבָבָם וּבְכָל־נַפְשָׁם לֵאמֹר לֹא־יִפְרֹת לְךָ אִישׁ מֵעַל כִּסֵּא יִשְׂרָאֵל:

⁵וְגַם אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה לִי יוֹאָב בֶּן־צְרוּיָה אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה לְשְׁנֵי־שָׂרֵי צְבָאוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל לְאַבְנֵר בֶּן־נֵר וְלַעֲמָשָׂא בֶן־יֵתֵר וַיַּהַרְגֵם וַיִּשֶׂם דַּמִּי־מִלְחָמָה בְּשָׁלֵם וַיִּתֵּן דַּמִּי מִלְחָמָה בְּחֻגְרָתוֹ אֲשֶׁר

1 Kings 2:1. he instructed The word translated as “he instructed” (*va-y’izav*) literally means “he commanded.” The term is used for final pronouncements. As used here, the verb has a double entendre, combining the force of an exhortation (Deut. 31:23) with the urgency of a final request (Gen. 49:29).

3–4. The references to obeying the Torah and commandments interrupt David’s practical and political exhortation. In a similar manner, Josh. 1:7–8 interrupt the exhortation of national courage in vv. 6 and 9. Later notions of Torah piety thus transform older injunctions.

3. Keep the charge of the LORD The word translated as “charge” (*mishmeret*) is a technical term for observing the Covenant, in the tradition of Deuteronomy. Elsewhere it has the sense of maintaining a watch, especially over priestly objects of sanctity.

4. your line . . . shall never end The promise that the royal line will not cease, or be cut off, is cited from the divine promise to David in 2 Sam. 7:12–16. Generational continuity is promised “forever” (v. 16).

with blood of war. ⁶So act in accordance with your wisdom, and see that his white hair does not go down to Sheol in peace.

⁷“But deal graciously with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, for they befriended me when I fled from your brother Absalom; let them be among those that eat at your table.

⁸“You must also deal with Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim. He insulted me outrageously when I was on my way to Mahanaim; but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD: ‘I will not put you to the sword.’ ⁹So do not let him go unpunished; for you are a wise man and you will know how to deal with him and send his gray hair down to Sheol in blood.”

¹⁰So David slept with his fathers, and he was buried in the City of David. ¹¹The length of David’s reign over Israel was forty years: he reigned seven years in Hebron, and he reigned thirty-three years in Jerusalem. ¹²And Solomon sat upon the throne of his father David, and his rule was firmly established.

12. and his rule was firmly established

This concluding line of the *haftarah* indicates Solomon’s success.

בְּמַתְנֵיוֹ וּבְנִעְלוֹ אֲשֶׁר בְּרַגְלָיו: ⁶וְעָשִׂיתָ
כְּחִכְמָתְךָ וְלֹא-תוֹרֵד שִׁיבְתוֹ בְּשָׁלֵם
שְׂאֵל: ס

⁷וּלְבָנָי בְּרוּלֵי הַגִּלְעָדִי תַעֲשֶׂה-חֶסֶד וְהָיוּ
בְּאֶכְלֵי שְׁלֹחַנְךָ כִּי-כֵן קָרְבוּ אֵלַי בְּבְרָחִי
מִפְּנֵי אֲבִשָׁלוֹם אַחִיקָה:

⁸וְהִנֵּה עִמָּךְ שְׁמֵעִי בֶן-גֵּרָא בֶן-הַיְמִינִי
מִבְּחָרִים וְהוּא קָלְלָנִי קָלְלָה נִמְרָצַת
בַּיּוֹם לְכַתְּתִי מִחַנְיָם וְהוּא-יִרְדֵּךְ לְקִרְאָתִי
הַיַּרְדֵּן וְאֲשַׁבַּע לּוֹ בַיהוָה לֵאמֹר אִם-
אֶמִיתְךָ בְּחָרְבִי: ⁹וְעַתָּה אֶל-תִּנְקְהוּ כִּי
אִישׁ חָכֵם אַתָּה וַיִּדְעַתָּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר
תַּעֲשֶׂה-לוֹ וְהוֹרֵדְתָּ אֶת-שִׁיבְתוֹ בַּדָּם
שְׂאֵל:

¹⁰וַיִּשְׁכַּב דָּוִד עִם-אֲבֹתָיו וַיִּקָּבֵר בְּעִיר
דָּוִד: פ ¹¹וְהַיָּמִים אֲשֶׁר מָלַךְ דָּוִד
עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל אַרְבָּעִים שָׁנָה בְּחֶבְרוֹן מָלַךְ
שִׁבְעַת שָׁנִים וּבִירוּשָׁלַם מָלַךְ שְׁלֹשִׁים
וּשְׁלֹשׁ שָׁנִים: ¹²וַשְׁלֹמֹה יָשָׁב עַל-כִּסֵּא
דָּוִד אָבִיו וְתַכְּנֵן מַלְכוּתוֹ מְאֹד: