



VAYEHI: FROM THE LOST SCROLL OF JACOB

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This excerpt is from the recently discovered Scroll of Jacob. The Scroll is a first person narrative of Jacob's life. The selection below allows us to look into Jacob's mind as he nears the end of his life in Egypt.

I have never been sick before. It is a strange feeling; my body is failing, while my mind is still sharp. The worst thing is my failing eyesight. I live in a dark prison these final days of my life. What is crueler is that for over twenty years, I did not see my son Joseph; now that we are together, I still cannot see him. Everyone around me thinks that since I cannot see that I am unaware of my surroundings. In fact, the opposite is true. Now with my sight gone, my other senses have become sharper. I hear more, smell more, taste more, feel more, and some days, I have visions of what must be the future.

This morning I had a vision of Joseph's sons, Menasheh and Ephraim. Each son had become a mighty nation. Menasheh was strong, but not as strong as Ephraim. My first reaction was horror: Not again! Have we not had enough sibling rivalry? Did Cain and Abel teach us nothing? Yitzchak and Yishmael? Esav and I? God help me, my own sons! Goodness knows that I turned a blind eye to how cruelly the others treated Joseph. It is a phase, I thought, they'd grow out of it and come to appreciate Joseph for who he is. They never did. The day I sent him to Dotan...who knew that it would be like the day that my Grandfather brought my father on that three-day journey.

I never let on that I suspected my sons in Joseph's disappearance. For years, nightmares filled my sleep with visions of my sons turning into wild beasts, with terrible teeth and sharp claws, tearing at Joseph. I never shared my suspicion with Leah, Bilhah or Zilpah. Who wants to believe that their son is a murderer?

Yet as the vision of Joseph's sons continued, I saw no strife or anger between them. Their relationship was peaceful and harmonious. Perhaps we have come to the end of sibling rivalry in our family. If every child were to live side-by-side, as these two will, that would truly be a blessing!

Joseph hardly comes to visit anymore; his work keeps him busy. I was not going to let him know that I was sick, but I wanted to see him one last time before my end. I sent a messenger to tell him that I was ill. He came running (I knew he would) with his two sons in tow. Joseph was expecting to receive the blessing. The one Avraham received from God. Avraham passed it on to my father, Yitzchak, and I tricked him into giving it to me. The family wants to know who will receive it next. I would give it to Joseph, but that might open old wounds among the brothers.

When Joseph and his sons arrived, they only announced Joseph, but I noticed the boys. I could smell them, and hear them moving in the room. Since I had to give the blessing to one of my sons, I decided to adopt Joseph's sons as my own. I could hear Joseph's jaw hit the floor when I told him. I asked, "Who are these?", letting them know that I knew they were in the room. Joseph replied, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." Joseph was always the one to put God in the picture. "Bring them to me," I said, "that I may bless them." Joseph brought them to me; I hugged and kissed them on the head. I never thought that I would see the day when I would embrace Joseph's children. Joseph bowed down, his sign that they had officially become my sons.

With this vision of their future still filling my mind, I blessed them, putting my right hand on Ephraim and my left on Menasheh. The stronger hand on the stronger nation; the left on the weaker. Then I blessed Joseph: "The God in whose ways my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak walked, the God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day - the Angel who has redeemed me from all harm - bless the lads. In them may my name be recalled, and the names of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak. And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth."

I could feel Joseph's emotions like a fire igniting in the room, but he calmed himself and coolly said, "Not so, Father, for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head." In those words, Joseph rightly placed the blame on me for his suffering. If only I had let Reuven live as the first-born; if only I had not given Joseph that coat; if only I had not been blind to how the others treated Joseph; if only I had not let my grief for Rachel limit my view of the world - things might have been different. Nevertheless, as Joseph always says, God sent him here. Still, I felt the accusation, but this time I was not guilty. He thought I was going to let this continue by treating the second-born like the first-born, repeating the cycle of rivalry all over again.

"I know, my son, I know." I know that I am the source of your greatest suffering. All I can do is tell you that I now see what I did, but I cannot apologize for it. Somehow, my grief for Rachel and showering my love for her on you brought us to this place. God has indeed saved our lives, though our family suffered to get here. I shared my vision of his sons' future with Joseph: his two sons become mighty nations, living together in peace. Now he knew that I saw the past and the future clearly. I instructed Joseph that every week, everyone in the family should bless their children thus: "May God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh."

May all of us know peace and harmony, love in our families and clear visions of our past, future and present. Shabbat Shalom.

Rabbi Pepperstone

(Note: There is no actual Scroll of Jacob)

AS A FAMILY:

- Before dinner on Friday night, bless your children. The blessing for boys is “May God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh.” The blessing for girls is “May God make you like Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah.”
- Tell your children what they did in the past week that you are proud of.
- As a family, talk about both the good things and the bad things that have happened to you in the past week. Do you see those things as random, or can you connect these back to God?

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THIS WEEK'S [TORAH](#) PORTION, TRY TO ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What does Jacob make Joseph swear to do after he dies?
2. What is the reason Jacob tells Joseph for adopting Menasheh and Ephraim?
3. What does Jacob say to Reuven on his deathbed?
4. What does Jacob say about Shimon and Levi? What is Jacob referring to?
5. Which son does Jacob say will be the seat of the kingship in Israel?
6. What did Joseph do with Jacob's body?
7. How long did Egyptians mourn Jacob's death?
8. Who went up to Canaan to bury Jacob?
9. What are Joseph's brothers worried about after Jacob's death?
10. What does Joseph say to his brothers before he dies?