

Blessed to Be a Blessing

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

¹ So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh, "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen." ² And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. ³ Pharaoh said to his brothers, "What is your occupation?" And they said to Pharaoh, "Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were." ⁴ They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen." ⁵ Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. ⁶ The land of Egypt is before you. Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land. Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, put them in charge of my livestock." – Genesis 46:28-47:6 ESV



As Jacob approached the land of Egypt, he pulled a page out of his long and storied playbook. Almost as if he was reliving his long-delayed reunion with his brother, Esau (Genesis 32:3), Jacob sent Judah ahead of the caravan, with instructions to find Joseph and request his assistance in finding the land granted to them by Pharaoh. Perhaps Jacob harbored suspicions and was attempting to ensure that the entire family was not walking into a trap set for them by the Egyptians. But Judah did as his father suggested and soon returned with Joseph, riding in his royal chariot. This scene must have the aged Jacob staggering from unbelief and overwhelmed by joy. There, standing right in front of him was the son that he had long thought to be dead. It was like witnessing a miracle, a veritable resurrection.

Joseph had grown up and was not wearing the familiar multicolored robe that Jacob had given him, but even in his old age and with failing eyesight, Jacob had no problem recognizing his boy. And their reunion was an emotional affair. Both men wept as they clung to one another in joy and disbelief. Neither had ever expected to see the other again. But God had graciously made it happen.

Having been given the unexpected blessing of seeing his son again, Jacob expressed his gratitude to God by stating that his long and adventure-filled life was now complete. He had lived to witness the impossible and was now ready to be with God.

“Now I am ready to die, since I have seen your face again and know you are still alive.” – Genesis 46:30 NLT

He could now die in peace, knowing that Joseph was alive, but also that his family had been preserved from certain death had they stayed in Canaan. All of his sons were together again and his family was under the watchful eye of Joseph and the gracious protection of Pharaoh.

Jacob and his sons were primarily shepherders. It had been while he was living in Haran with his in-laws, that Jacob had been blessed by God with great wealth in the form of herds and flocks.

Thus the man increased greatly and had large flocks, female servants and male servants, and camels and donkeys. – Genesis 30:43 ESV

But eventually, Jacob made the fateful decision to return home to Canaan, the land that had been promised to his father and grandfather by God.

So Jacob arose and set his sons and his wives on camels. He drove away all his livestock, all his property that he had gained, the livestock in his possession that he had acquired in Paddan-aram, to go to the land of Canaan to his father Isaac. – Genesis 31:17-18 ESV



And, once Jacob returned to Canaan, his assets had continued to increase. It had been while pasturing their father's flocks in Dothan, that the brothers of Joseph had made the decision to turn against Joseph, eventually selling him into slavery. But now, years later, these very same shepherds and their vast flocks would find employment in the most unlikely of places. Joseph informed his father and brothers that he was going to request permission from Pharaoh that they be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen with their flocks. This was an ingenious plan on the part of Joseph because he knew that the Egyptians held shepherds in great disdain.

If he could convince Pharaoh to let his family settle in the fertile land of Goshen, he knew the Egyptians would give them wide berth, avoiding them at all costs “for everyone who takes care of sheep is disgusting to the Egyptians” (Genesis 46:28 NET).

Unsurprisingly, Pharaoh agreed with Joseph’s plan, decreeing that Jacob and his sons should settle in the land of Goshen. And in addition, he hired Joseph’s brothers to tend his herds and flocks as well. In other words, he guaranteed the Israelites a steady income for as long as they lived in the land.

“Now that your father and brothers have joined you here, choose any place in the entire land of Egypt for them to live. Give them the best land of Egypt. Let them live in the region of Goshen. And if any of them have special skills, put them in charge of my livestock, too.” – Genesis 47:5-6 NLT

In a sense, Jacob’s family was set for life. They had gone from facing a famine in Canaan to a land of fruitfulness where their flocks could thrive, and their clan could survive. It was all almost too good to be true. But it was all in keeping with the promise that God had made to Abraham.

“I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you...” – Genesis 12:2-3 ESV

And this was the very same promise that God had reiterated to Jacob when he had returned to Canaan from his time in Haran.

“Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” – Genesis 35:10-12 ESV

Little did Jacob know at the time that this promise would require a not-so-brief detour to the land of Egypt. But it would be in Egypt that God would greatly increase the number of Jacob’s descendants. As they made themselves at home in the land of Canaan, they found themselves unharassed by enemies and able to enjoy relative peace and prosperity in their new home.

In the book of Exodus, Moses reveals what transpired while the Israelites lived in the land of Egypt. They had entered Egypt, few in number, but they did not stay that way.

All the descendants of Jacob were seventy persons; Joseph was already in Egypt. Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. But the people of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them. – Exodus 1:5-7 ESV

God was behind this entire transition from Canaan to Egypt. It had all been for a much greater purpose than anyone realized at the time. Pharaoh had been generous and Joseph showed his gratitude by conveying a blessing on him. In keeping with the promise of God, the descendants of Abraham were proving to be a blessing to the nations. Because of Joseph, Pharaoh and his countrymen had been spared the effects of a seven-year famine. He was now more rich and powerful than he had ever been, thanks to Joseph's ingenuity and foresight. And God would use the once-despised, falsely accused, and unjustly imprisoned Joseph to bless the family of Israel.

So Joseph assigned the best land of Egypt—the region of Rameses—to his father and his brothers, and he settled them there, just as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph provided food for his father and his brothers in amounts appropriate to the number of their dependents, including the smallest children. – Genesis 47:11-12 ESV

The Land of “Evil” and Blessing

⁷ Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. ⁸ And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” ⁹ And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning.” ¹⁰ And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. ¹¹ Then Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹² And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s household with food, according to the number of their dependents.

¹³ Now there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished by reason of the famine. ¹⁴ And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, in exchange for the grain that they bought. And Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh’s house. ¹⁵ And when the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, “Give us food. Why should we die before your eyes? For our money is gone.” ¹⁶ And Joseph answered, “Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone.” ¹⁷ So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses, the flocks, the herds, and the donkeys. He supplied them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. ¹⁸ And when that year was ended, they came to him the following year and said to him, “We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent. The herds of livestock are my lord’s. There is nothing left in the sight of my lord but our bodies and our land. ¹⁹ Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate.” – Genesis 47:7-19 ESV



Joseph settled his family in the land of Goshen, which was located in the northern-most region of Egypt. As the text reveals, it was also known as “the land of Rameses.” It seems likely that Moses used this name because his readers would have been more familiar with that designation. Rameses was the name of a modern city in the region and it means, “Ra [the sun god] has created it.” Moses wanted his readers to understand exactly where their ancestors had settled with they first entered Egypt. The mention of Rameses gave them a much clearer idea of where Jacob and his family began what would become a four-century long stay for the people of Israel.

Moses provides a brief description of what was probably Jacob's only encounter with Pharaoh. Due to his son's position of high rank in Pharaoh's court, Jacob was given an audience before this powerful world leader and Pharaoh treated Jacob with dignity and respect. When he inquired as to Jacob's age, the patriarch stated, "The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years" (Genesis 47:9 ESV).

It's fascinating to consider why Moses included this verbal exchange between the all-powerful Pharaoh and the weak and elderly father of Joseph. One man was the epitome of power and influence, while the other was in the latter stages of his life and completely dependent upon his son's kindness and Pharaoh's mercies. And when Jacob answered Pharaoh's question, it's interesting to note the specific words he used. Jacob stated that, while he had lived to be 130-years old, "few and **evil** have been the days of the years of my life" (Genesis 47:9 ESV). In comparison to his father and grandfather, Jacob considered himself to be a youngster. Abraham had died at the ripe old age of 175, and Isaac had died at 180.

But Jacob referred to his relatively short life as having been "evil." The Hebrew word he used is רַע (*ra'*), which, in the Scriptures, is most often translated as "evil," but can also mean painful and full of sorrow. But it seems ironic that Jacob used this particular Hebrew word to describe his life on earth because it was very similar to the name of the Egyptian god for whom the region known as Rameses was named.

"Ra is the Egyptian word for 'sun'. As a solar deity, Ra embodied the power of the sun but was also thought to be the sun itself, envisioned as the great god riding in his barge across the heavens throughout the day and descending into the underworld at sunset.

"According to scholar Richard H. Wilkinson, Ra is "arguably Egypt's most important deity" not only because of his association with the life-giving sun but also through his influence on the development of later gods

"He was known as the Self-Created-One who appears in creation myths as the deity (interchangeably known as Atum) who stands on the primordial mound amidst the swirling waters of chaos and establishes order, gives birth to the other gods, and creates the world." – Mark, Joshua J.. "Ra (Egyptian God)." World History Encyclopedia

It doesn't seem to be a coincidence that Jacob described his life on earth as having been *ra'* or evil, and the name for the land in which he was about to relocate was named for an Egyptian god named Ra. And each word is pronounced "rah," in either Hebrew or Egyptian. Was Jacob using this word on purpose, or did Moses choose to use it in order to express an opinion to his readers.

There may be a bit of foreshadowing taking place. Moses knew the rest of the story and, in choosing to use this word, he may have been hinting that the coming days the Israelites would spend in **Rameses** (Ra [the sun god] has created it) would also be filled with evil. While Goshen would prove to be a hospitable sight in the early days of Jacob's sojourn, Moses appears to be

telegraphing that the good graces of Pharaoh would soon turn evil. The land that Ra had created would eventually become inhospitable and unwelcoming.

But this rather short aside by Moses is followed by his description of Jacob's settlement in the land.

Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded... – Genesis 47:11 ESV

And having successfully relocated his family to Goshen, Joseph ensured that they had plenty of food to eat because the famine was far from over.

In the following verses, Moses shifts his attention on the leadership skills of Joseph, outlining his ongoing plan to provide for the ongoing needs of the people of Egypt while successfully enhancing the power and wealth of Pharaoh.

It is essential to remember that the famine was widespread. Egypt was no better off than Canaan, but because of Joseph had been blessed by God and equipped with divinely inspired leadership, he had been able to set up a strategy that took advantage of the seven years of fruitfulness that had preceded the seven years of famine. He had overseen the creation of a vast supply network of storehouses filled with grain. So, when the famine came and no one was able to grow crops, the people could come and buy grain from Pharaoh's well-stocked granaries.

Moses goes out of his way to describe the gravity of the situation.

...there was no food in all the land, for the famine was very severe... – Genesis 47:13 ESV

But because of Joseph's ingenuity and planning, the people were able to purchase all the grain they needed, with the profits going directly into Pharaoh's royal treasury. God was blessing the nations just as He had promised to Abraham, and He was doing it through Joseph, the great-grandson of Abraham. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob was blessing Pharaoh, who worshiped the false god, Ra.

According to the World History Encyclopedia, "Ra's presence on earth was recognized by sunlight and the growth of crops as well as the changing seasons." And yet, the survival of the Egyptians was based on the good graces of the Joseph's God, the true creator of heaven and earth. Ra had proved incapable of sustaining the food supply of the very people who worshiped and offered sacrifices to him. But the God of Joseph had managed to provide more than enough food to feed the people of Egypt, with plenty left over to meet the needs of Jacob's family.

As the years passed and the famine continued, the people eventually ran out of money, so they were forced to exchange their livestock for grain. When the famine failed to end, they were left

with nothing to trade except their land and their own bodies. Desperate for food, they essentially sold themselves into servitude to Pharaoh.

What's fascinating to consider is that all the while the Egyptians were exhausting their savings, selling of all their livestock, and sacrificing their land and their freedom in order to survive, Joseph was caring for the needs of Jacob and his family. Their livestock and land remained their own. They were never required to pay for a single ounce of grain. So, they prospered, and their flocks flourished while everyone else around them was forced into penury and servitude.

The people of Egypt, in a desperate attempt to survive the relentless effects of the famine, relinquished all rights to their property, possessions, and personal rights.

“Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we with our land will be servants to Pharaoh. And give us seed that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate.” – Genesis 47:19 ESV

And one can only imagine how they felt about the Israelites who were prospering in the land of Goshen, which had been created by their god, Ra.

A Famine and Fruitfulness

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

²³ Then Joseph said to the people, "Behold, I have this day bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Now here is seed for you, and you shall sow the land. ²⁴ And at the harvests you shall give a fifth to Pharaoh, and four fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones." ²⁵ And they said, "You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh." ²⁶ So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth; the land of the priests alone did not become Pharaoh's.

²⁷ Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly. ²⁸ And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.

²⁹ And when the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "If now I have found favor in your sight, put your hand under my thigh and promise to deal kindly and truly with me. Do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰ but let me lie with my fathers. Carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place." He answered, "I will do as you have said." ³¹ And he said, "Swear to me"; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed. – Genesis 47:20-31 ESV



With his family comfortably settled in the land of Goshen, Joseph returned to his duties of stewarding the well-being of Pharaoh's empire. Throughout the year seven years of famine, he used the grain he had stockpiled during the seven years of plenty to feed the starving citizens of the country. But didn't set up a welfare state. Instead, he sold the grain to the people. And when their money ran out, he traded grain for

livestock. When their supply of livestock was exhausted, the people were allowed to trade in their land holdings for grain, amassing an extensive real estate empire for the state. Then, when the people no longer had any money to spend, livestock to sell, or land to trade, they were left with only one option: To become the indentured servants of Pharaoh. And while this may

appear as an egregious example of government overreach, Joseph was actually using the government's administrative capabilities to protect and preserve the people and the nation.

Joseph allowed the people to continue living on the land, raising crops as they had done before. But he imposed a 20 percent tax on all agricultural production. This levy, while high, would allow Pharaoh's administration to continue their food assistance program throughout the remaining years of the famine. The people were allowed to keep four-fifths of whatever they harvested, but the remaining one-fifth went into the royal granaries. And the people did not see any of this as a land grab or a form of government-led extortion. They were grateful to be alive.

"You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh." – Genesis 47:25 ESV

Yet, it should not be overlooked that, while the people of Egypt were slowly handing over their resources, lands, and freedoms to the state, the people of Israel were enjoying the blessings of God in Goshen.

Meanwhile, the people of Israel settled in the region of Goshen in Egypt. There they acquired property, and they were fruitful, and their population grew rapidly. – Genesis 47:27 NLT

It seems that the Israelites were able to take advantage of the dire situation in Egypt by buying up land that their Egyptian neighbors were being forced to sell. All during the famine, Joseph provided Jacob and the rest of his family with food. Jacob had entered Egypt a very wealthy man, and he used his formidable resources to accumulate a growing real estate portfolio in Egypt. As his family grew, so did his land holdings. God was fulfilling the promise He had made to Jacob years earlier.

"Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name." So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, "I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply." – Genesis 35:10-11 ESV

At that time, Jacob had no idea that the fruitfulness and multiplication of his family would take place in Egypt and not Canaan. But that had been God's plan all along. Even Joseph understood that reality. Everything that had happened in his life had been according to the preordained, sovereign will of God Almighty. He would later emphasize that fact to his brothers.

"Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." – Genesis 50:19-21 ESV

So, Jacob's migration to Egypt had been God's will. He had planned it, orchestrated it, and was now fulfilling it in real-time. But Jacob would not live long enough to see Canaan again. In fact, none of his sons, including Joseph would ever set foot in the promised land again. Jacob would live an additional 17 years, dying at the ripe old age of 147. But as he looked around him, he could see the signs of God's blessings everywhere. He had lived to see his long-lost son restored to his side. He was the proud patriarch of a rapidly growing clan living in a fruitful land that God had miraculously provided. And while he had never owned an acre of land in Canaan, he had been able to take title to a large portion of the land in Egypt's rich Nile delta.

But Jacob never saw Egypt as his home. To the end of his life, he still retained his love and longing for the land of Canaan. He had not forgotten God's promise to provide the land of Canaan as his inheritance. And, while he knew he would never make it back there alive, he made Joseph swear that his body would be returned to Canaan for burial, in the very same plot of land that Abraham had bought to bury Sarah. Even in death, he wanted to be associated with the land of promise. And Joseph swore an oath to fulfill his father's dying wish.

For Jacob, Egypt was simply a temporary, but necessary diversion in the journey toward God's fulfillment of the promise. Whether or not he knew the details that God had shared with his grandfather, Abraham, is unclear. In Genesis 15:13, Moses records God's announcement to Abraham that his descendants would spend 400 years in a foreign land. But at the end of that lengthy period of time, they would return to the land of Canaan. And whether Jacob had a four-century delay in mind, he knew that the day would come when God returned His people to their land.

The Sovereign Switch

¹ After this, Joseph was told, "Behold, your father is ill." So he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² And it was told to Jacob, "Your son Joseph has come to you." Then Israel summoned his strength and sat up in bed. ³ And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession.' ⁵ And now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶ And the children that you fathered after them shall be yours. They shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷ As for me, when I came from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

⁸ When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, "Who are these?" ⁹ Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me here." And he said, "Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them." ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. So Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹ And Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face; and behold, God has let me see your offspring also." ¹² Then Joseph removed them from his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. ¹⁴ And Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). ¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph and said,

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

¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him, and he took his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said to his father, "Not this way, my father; since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head." ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations." ²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying,

"By you Israel will pronounce blessings, saying,
'God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh.'"

Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. ²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your fathers. ²² Moreover, I have given to you rather than to your brothers one mountain slope that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.” – Genesis 48:1-22 ESV



As Moses begins to bring the book of Genesis to a close, he also narrates the closing days of Jacob's life. As the patriarch of his family, Jacob had a responsibility to pass on his blessings to his sons, preparing the way for the future of their clan after his departure from this life. He had lived a long and was ready to pass the mantle of leadership to his 12 sons, allowing them to guide the next generation as they awaited the fulfillment of the promise that God had made to him so many years earlier.

Jacob, while 147-years-old, was far from senile. His eyes were failing but his memory was as sharp ever. He could recall with vivid detail the day when God had ordered him to leave Mesopotamia and return to Canaan. Along the way, God had appeared to him and delivered the following promise:

“Your name is Jacob; no longer shall your name be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” So he called his name Israel. And God said to him, “I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply. A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body. The land that I gave to Abraham and Isaac I will give to you, and I will give the land to your offspring after you.” – Genesis 35:10-12 ESV

But now, Jacob and his family were living in the land of Egypt. Because of the devastating famine that had ravaged Canaan, they had been forced to seek refuge in Goshen, taking up residence in the land graciously provided to them by Pharaoh. Due to Joseph's high rank in the Egyptian administration, they were provided with ample food to meet all their needs, even as their clan continued to grow in number.

Even during their self-imposed exile in Egypt, Jacob and his sons had been fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply. And while they may not have recognized it, their small clan was slowly evolving into a great nation. When they had arrived in Egypt, they had only been 70 in number, but during the 17 years that Jacob lived in Egypt, “they were fruitful, and their population grew rapidly” (Genesis 47:27 NLT).

God was at work, blessing the offspring of Abraham just as He had promised to do. And while their detour into Egypt may have appeared to them as an unexpected glitch in God's plan, it had part of the plan all along. While in Egypt, they were sequestered safely in the land of

Goshen, protected by the hand of Pharaoh, and amply provided for by Joseph. They were safe, secure, and sovereignly provided for by God Almighty.

Yet, Jacob's days were numbered. He would not be leaving Egypt or returning to the land of Canaan. And he would not live to see his growing clan transformed by God into a mighty nation. But, as the patriarch, he could do his part to pass on his blessings to those who would carry on after his death.

Joseph, upon hearing that his father's health was diminishing, brought his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to pay their last respects to their grandfather. These two boys had been born to Joseph and his Egyptian wife, "Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera priest of On" (Genesis 41:45 ESV). So, they were half Egyptian and half Hebrew. But Jacob was not fazed by this seemingly disqualifying detail. He too had fathered sons from non-Hebrew women. And to illustrate his full acceptance of Joseph's two sons, he announced that he was adopting them as his own. They would be given equal standing with the rest of his sons and afforded full rights as his descendants.

The scene that Moses describes is somewhat confusing and can leave the impression that Jacob was an old, doddering man who didn't know what he was doing. As he called for Joseph to bring the two boys forward so that he might bless them, Jacob appears to mistakenly place his hands on the heads of the two boys. Moses is quite precise in his language, stating that Joseph purposefully placed his older son, Manasseh before Jacob's right hand. It was from Jacob's right hand that Manasseh would have received the blessing of the firstborn. But at the last second, Jacob switched his hands, placing his right hand on the head of Joseph's younger son, Ephraim.

Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, crossing his hands (for Manasseh was the firstborn). – Genesis 48:14 ESV

Joseph was unaware of this "slight of hands," because he had "bowed himself with his face to the earth" (Genesis 48:12 ESV). He did not notice Jacob's subtle, yet significant change of plans until it was too late.

While the blessing that Jacob uttered seems equitable in nature, his switching of the hands gave greater precedence to the younger son. Jacob asked that God would bless both boys and make them fruitful, but he seems to have intended that Ephraim receive the blessing of the double blessing due to the firstborn.

Under the inspiration of God, Jacob deliberately gave Ephraim the privileged first-born blessing and predicted his preeminence. This was the fourth consecutive generation of Abraham's descendants in which the normal pattern of the firstborn assuming prominence over the second born was reversed: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben, and Ephraim over Manasseh. – Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis*

This was a deliberate action on Jacob's part, not the feeble-minded mistake of an old man. He knew exactly what he was doing. The text does not reveal why Jacob made this decision, but it would seem that he was acting under divine inspiration. This was the will of God. This conclusion is not based on conjecture, but on the words written by the author of Hebrews. In chapter 11, the great "Hall of Faith," Jacob is included in the long list of Old Testament saints who exhibited faith in the promises of Yahweh. And Jacob's demonstration of faith is tied to his blessing of the two sons of Joseph.

By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff. – Hebrews 11:21 ESV

The switching of his hands and the pronouncement of blessing had been an act of worship. Just had been proven true in his life, God was going to use the younger son to accomplish His will.

But when Joseph realized what was happening, he tried to intervene and correct the mistake by switching his father's hands. Yet Jacob refused to budge. His decision had been deliberate and was final. He informed Joseph, "I know, my son; I know,...Manasseh will also become a great people, but his younger brother will become even greater. And his descendants will become a multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19 NLT).

The die was cast. The blessings were awarded. And Ephraim would eventually be the name associated with the northern tribe of Israel after the nation was split in two. God would fulfill the blessing and make of Ephraim a great nation.

Moses makes it quite clear that this was a deliberate action on the part of Jacob.

Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. – Genesis 48:20 ESV

And while Joseph was not happy with the results, it was exactly what God had intended all along. His ways are not our ways. His plans do not always align with our own. Every detail of the story was happening according to God's divine will and the ultimate outcome of each decision would not be fully revealed or realized for centuries. But there were no mistakes in God's sovereign agenda.