

# Jacob: Recovering From Regret

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This will be our final study in the book of Genesis. I sincerely hope that you have all enjoyed this study as much as I have and been blessed by these stories in a fresh and new way. As we finish up the book though, I thought it would be fitting to spend the last study focusing on Jacob and how the final chapters of this book wrap up his life and character arc. As we have talked about before, as much as the book of Genesis can have a “main character”, aside from God of course, Jacob would most certainly be the prime candidate for that title. The book of Genesis has been divided into 50 chapters for us by the Biblical translators, and these 50 chapters cover human history all the way from our creation, to the fall, all the way to the lives of the patriarchs of the nation of Israel.

Amongst this sprawling narrative, we are introduced to Jacob all the way back in chapter 25, which means that the life of Jacob comprises almost half of the overall book. Beyond that, it is from Jacob that the people of God derive their name. It is in Genesis 32 that Jacob famously wrestles with God Himself and receives the name “Israel”, meaning, “one who wrestles with God”. From that time forward, this name has identified the nation of the Jews, as well as those faithful to God in the New Covenant:

*“And as many as walk according to this rule, peace and mercy be upon them, and upon the Israel of God.”*

*-Galatians 6:16*

The people of God are not identified with a name like “Islam”, which means “submission”, but instead with this name that means “one who wrestles with God”. Jacob becomes our ultimate example, not of perfect submission to God, but of one who struggled with God throughout his life, and yet found submission and faithfulness. For me personally, it has been a great blessing to go back through the story of Jacob and to be reminded of this truth throughout the various struggles that he faced. In this study, we will talk about one of the biggest difficulties that Jacob had to wrestle with, his own regret and shame.

# The Power of Regret

*“Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, “For I shall go down into the grave to my son in mourning.” Thus his father wept for him.”*

*-Genesis 37:34-35*

Before we discuss the sorry state that the household of Jacob is in after Joseph’s long “absence” we first have to talk about why it got the way that it did. After the death of Rachel, Jacob made Joseph the center of his life and the pride of his family. His hopes seemed to be that Joseph would fix his family and straighten out his own wayward brothers, which is why Jacob put him in a place of authority over his older brothers. However, when Joseph died, all of Jacob’s hopes died with him. This deep regret, this feeling that, not only was his son killed, but that *he* had failed to protect him, is what is driving the disunity found in Jacob’s home.

This type of regret can fracture anyone’s life, and it can be created in numerous ways. In keeping with this account, parents that suffer the loss of a child, regardless if it was actually the fault of one of the parents, are far more likely to divorce. But even if a child doesn’t die, if they are diseased, wayward, or rebellious, the underlying regret can manifest in much the same ways that we are going to see in Jacob’s family. Even if the regret is not revolving around a child, it can be the loss of career, health, a broken relationship, an unexpected death, and many other things. Regret is a powerful force that can create the kind of mourning that refuses to be comforted.

## The Sound of Silence

*“When Jacob saw that there was grain in Egypt, Jacob said to his sons, “Why do you look at one another?” And he said, “Indeed I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.” So Joseph’s ten brothers went down to buy grain in Egypt. But Jacob did not send Joseph’s brother Benjamin with his brothers, for he said, “Lest some calamity befall him.”*

*-Genesis 42:1-4*

With characteristic subtlety the author of Genesis expertly reveals to us the broken family dynamic in these few short verses. After the “death” of Joseph the family of Jacob is irretrievably broken and dysfunctional. We can *feel* the underlying tension in the room when Jacob passive aggressively tells his sons “Why do you look at one another?... I have heard that there is grain in Egypt; go down to that place and buy for us there, that we may live and not die.” This tension is further revealed by the fact that Jacob will not

allow his new favorite son, Benjamin, to go with his brothers “Lest some calamity befall him.”

Although it is not explicitly stated, it seems as though Jacob doubted the narrative of his sons that Joseph was eaten by a wild animal. Instead, he seems to harbor resentment towards his sons, which, even though it happens to be correct, is still misguided, and the brothers in fear of revealing the truth to their father, live in this constant state of tension and implicit blame. Notice how Jacob comments “Why do you look at one another?” As though the home of Jacob had become a place where looks were exchanged in the place of words, where everyone walked on eggshells due to the underlying tension. This truth is further proven when Joseph begins his “testing” of his brothers and keeps Simeon in Egypt as collateral until the brothers return with Benjamin. When Jacob hears this he says:

*“And Jacob their father said to them, “You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me.”*  
-Genesis 42:36

Jacob’s doubt towards his son’s character was so severe that he would rather abandon Simeon to an uncertain fate than risk the life of Benjamin in their hands. We can also see in phrases like “All these things are against me.” That this household of implicit blame, self-pity, and passive aggressive remarks has made the home of Jacob almost unbearable. It is the kind of tension that is only possible when a home has learned to cope with problems through silence and has lost the ability to directly confront problems. In such an environment, the room is filled with words left unsaid, where nothing but bitterness and blame have come to saturate the air and choke out any possibility of genuine joy. This account reminds me of a proverb:

*“Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fatted calf with hatred.”*  
-Proverbs 15:17

This type of silent tension can arise in a home for many different reasons. One of the big ones for this family is that Jacob came from a family that acted just like this. Where Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob’s parents, silently fought about their children through passive aggressive behavior and unspoken disapproval, this then bled down into Jacob’s character making him a passive man unable to directly confront problems. But what has made this problem significantly worse is the overwhelming regret that Jacob feels in “losing” Joseph.

The regret that Jacob feels, that has manifested in implicit blame towards his 10 of his sons and an over-sheltering of Benjamin because he has not learned how to have an honest conversation with his sons. I think the movie that illustrates this concept the best is "A Quiet Place". In this movie, seemingly invincible monsters have taken over the world and ruthlessly hunt down anyone who makes the smallest sound. In the beginning of the movie, the protagonist couple, played by real life married couple John Krasinski and Emily Blunt, lose their youngest child to one of these ravenous monsters.

What the film cleverly does is show how a terrible tragedy like this can create a curse of silence upon a family. Even though as the audience we know that the silence is created by the monsters, we quickly realize that the real hell is that this family has lost the ability to speak the truth to one another. They are left in this deafening silence that has torn the heart of this family and left a general feeling of distrust and implicit blame. This is a side note, but this is what true horror is supposed to be. Not graphic violence, but a subtle symbolism of genuinely destructive things depicted in an uncanny appearance. To put this point another way, this movie is not actually about terrifying monsters from space, but instead about the real life horror created when a family loses the ability to talk to one another.

This is exactly what has happened in Jacob's family. They can no longer communicate and so they end up talking past one another as opposed to talking with one another.

## Blame and Self-pity

*"And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin. All these things are against me." Then Reuben spoke to his father, saying, "Kill my two sons if I do not bring him back to you; put him in my hands, and I will bring him back to you." But he said, "My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he is left alone. If any calamity should befall him along the way in which you go, then you would bring down my gray hair with sorrow to the grave."*

*-Genesis 42:36-38*

The tension filled silence is then, periodically, interrupted by exclamations of blame and self-pity like the one above. When Jacob says "All these things are against me." We can see that he really does see himself as the ultimate victim in this scenario. He has ceased to be a father to his sons and has instead taken upon himself the demeanor of a whining victim who is always looking for an opportunity to declare how bitterly unfair his life has been. In fact, later on in the story, even after Joseph is restored to him, notice how Jacob speaks to the Pharaoh of Egypt:

*“Then Joseph brought in his father Jacob and set him before Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How old are you?” And Jacob said to Pharaoh, “The days of the years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty 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 pilgrimage.” So Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh.”*

*-Genesis 47:7-10*

It is unfortunately true that old habits die hard. Jacob has been called to bless the head of state, and instead takes the opportunity to complain about the short and bitter nature of his life. This account is very near to an account from King David's life. Although David begins his story as a highly confident young man, due to numerous mistakes and miscalculations, he fails to properly raise his children. This massive oversight results in one of David's sons, Amnon, raping one of David's own daughters, Tamar. David is too broken over the circumstances to adequately punish his son, leaving the responsibility to another one of his son's, Absalom.

Absalom becomes so angered by his father's impotence that he stages a coup and forcibly takes the throne from David. As David is leaving Jerusalem in shame the following event occurs:

*“Also Shimei said thus when he cursed: “Come out! Come out! You bloodthirsty man, you rogue! “The LORD has brought upon you all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom your son. So now you are caught in your own evil, because you are a bloodthirsty man!” Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Please, let me go over and take off his head!” But the king said, “What have I to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? So let him curse, because the LORD has said to him, ‘Curse David.’ Who then shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’” And David said to Abishai and all his servants, “See how my son who came from my own body seeks my life. How much more now may this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse; for so the LORD has ordered him. “It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day.”*

*-2 Samuel 16:7-12*

I think the key phrase in this section is “See how my own son who came from my own body seeks my life...” David is so distraught over the failures he has as a parent that he willingly wallows in self-pity, feeling as though he deserves to be destroyed by his own guilt and shame over his past. Jacob does the same thing. Never fully recovering from

the loss of Joseph, but only reminiscing about his past tragedy, refusing to be healed or to move on.

But, when he isn't wallowing in self-pity, he is blaming other people for his lot in life. *"And Jacob their father said to them, "You have bereaved me: Joseph is no more, Simeon is no more, and you want to take Benjamin."*

As the readers of this story, we know that Jacob's sons are actually guilty for Joseph's "disappearance", but Jacob is not aware of this fact. It is easy to read this account, and let Jacob off the hook simply because he happened to be right about the guilt of his sons. But unfortunately, this convenient fact actually does not excuse Jacob's behavior. In the Bible we are constantly told to not show partiality or preference to any person.

*"My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?"*

*-James 2:1-4*

In our modern culture that has been shaped by Christian ethics, this passage does not seem odd to us, and I can even make the argument that, culturally, we have actually taken this principle too far and that we tend to give partiality to the poor over the rich, but that is a topic for another time. But for the ancient world, this statement would have seemed foolish and naive. Not only because most ancient cultures had some view of karma, meaning that material wealth was a sign of spiritual wealth or goodness, but also because of practical observation.

The truth is, wealth is not easily accumulated, especially in the ancient world before things like bank accounts. In order for a person to be wealthy, and to maintain that wealthy status, they had to possess numerous positive traits in order to do so. By and large, they had to be financially savvy, hard working, generous, trust-worthy, and prudent. They were also privy to higher forms of education and, since they were in the center of the society, they were a part of a social structure with higher ethical expectations.

However, in spite of all this, James tells the church not to practice this type of partiality in the church. For although this is widely true, and if we assumed the moral goodness of successful people our prejudice would be rewarded more often than not, it is still not

right to do morally, and while we might be right most of the time, we wouldn't be right all of the time. We wouldn't even be right about the person in general, we would only be correct about those few virtues. There are in fact successful people who have made it to their position through inheritance and/or deceptive and oppressive tactics. Because of this, God warns His people from using "shortcuts" when judging other people and encourages us to get to know an individual before judging them. It reminds me of a quote from C.S. Lewis:

*"I happen to believe that you can't study men, you can only get to know them, which is quite a different thing."*

*-C.S. Lewis - "That Hideous Strength"*

Even though Jacob just so happens to be correct in his suspicions about his sons, he hasn't actually gotten to know any of his sons. He has walled his heart off and taken it upon himself to cynically judge the hearts of his children without even verifying if his prejudice is correct. This cynical pre-judgement goes so far that he begins to blame his children for everything, including things that they didn't even do, like when he blames them for Simeon being left in Egypt. The unfortunate truth is that Jacob's regret has made him into a terrible father who both plays the victim as well as cynically judging all those around him.

## Rejection of Responsibility

*"Now the famine was severe in the land. And it came to pass, when they had eaten up the grain which they had brought from Egypt, that their father said to them, "Go back, buy us a little food." But Judah spoke to him, saying, "The man solemnly warned us, saying, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' "If you send our brother with us, we will go down and buy you food. "But if you will not send him, we will not go down; for the man said to us, 'You shall not see my face unless your brother is with you.' " And Israel said, "Why did you deal so wrongfully with me as to tell the man whether you had still another brother?"*

*-Genesis 43:1-6*

Even though it might feel as though we are doing the right thing when we afflict our own souls and wallow in the guilt and regret of our past, we are actually making everyone around us miserable. Not only through our explicit behavior, but also through our abdication of our own responsibilities. Jacob is the head of his home, and he is tasked with taking care of his family. But, people who have stopped taking care of themselves are usually pretty bad at taking care of others.

Jacob's sons explicitly told him that they couldn't come back to Egypt without Benjamin, but Jacob here is reiterating this problem, not to look for solutions or to entrust Benjamin to them, but instead to complain about the problem while blaming his sons for their coming demise. Thankfully, Judah is able to rebuke his father correctly and Jacob listens to him, but what Jacob shows us is that a person who is wallowing in regret over the past, has also abdicated their responsibilities. After all, it isn't really possible to, on one hand, play the victim who complains about the unfairness of your own life, and on the other hand to take responsibility for your life and move forward. Once again, this same pattern comes to David during his ordeal with his own son.

After the coup, David's armies are eventually successful in defeating Absalom, with little to no help from David himself. After this victory though, notice how David reacts:

*"And Joab was told, "Behold, the king is weeping and mourning for Absalom." So the victory that day was turned into mourning for all the people. For the people heard it said that day, "The king is grieved for his son." And the people stole back into the city that day, as people who are ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. But the king covered his face, and the king cried out with a loud voice, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!" Then Joab came into the house to the king, and said, "Today you have disgraced all your servants who today have saved your life, the lives of your sons and daughters, the lives of your wives and the lives of your concubines, "in that you love your enemies and hate your friends. For you have declared today that you regard neither princes nor servants; for today I perceive that if Absalom had lived and all of us had died today, then it would have pleased you well. "Now therefore, arise, go out and speak comfort to your servants. For I swear by the LORD, if you do not go out, not one will stay with you this night. And that will be worse for you than all the evil that has befallen you from your youth until now." Then the king arose and sat in the gate. And they told all the people, saying, "There is the king, sitting in the gate." So all the people came before the king. For everyone of Israel had fled to his tent."*

-2 Samuel 19:1-8

While the grief that David was experiencing was not only understandable, but just, his behavior is anything but just. His guilt and his sorrow were his own and he needed to deal with them in the proper way, before God. Instead, he burdens those around him with his own emotions without any concern for the negative ways that this would affect his troops morale. Once again, when we are consumed by regret, especially if that regret is linked to our own personal failure, it might seem just to sit in that regret and wallow incessantly. But the truth is far different. This decision is actually built upon a conceited view.

The fact of the matter is that David, like Jacob, were leaders of their people. Just because we may abdicate our roles as leaders due to guilt or shame over our past doesn't mean that we have ceased to be leaders, it only means that we are poor leaders. Notice that David's inappropriate mourning *did* lead his people to question the goodness of their victory. Just as Jacob's decision to leave Simeon in Egypt resulted in Simeon being left on his own for numerous months, but also for the family to come close to starvation. While guilt is a convenient excuse to abdicate responsibility, that doesn't make it just.

This also applies to our responsibility for other people's emotions. We have to consider carefully how our own behavior might affect those around us and take responsibility for the way that we behave around others. In our modern validation culture we are taught that the highest good is self-authenticity, meaning that we have the right to vent all of our feelings and everyone else has the responsibility to hear us out and give us validation, but the Bible teaches something quite different:

*"A fool vents all his feelings, But a wise man holds them back."  
-Proverbs 29:11*

This is not to say that we are to live dishonestly and hypocritically, but it is to say that we are responsible for the feelings of others. Therefore, it isn't right to casually burden those around us with our own negative feelings. There should be people around us who we can trust to counsel and help us through our feelings, but this is not the same as venting. Venting is simply putting our emotions on other people, counsel on the other hand is the act of allowing another person to speak into our emotions and, hopefully, guide us to more just and correct emotional responses.

## Recovering From Regret

*"Then Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones. "I myself will be surety for him; from my hand you shall require him. If I do not bring him back to you and set him before you, then let me bear the blame forever. "For if we had not lingered, surely by now we would have returned this second time." And their father Israel said to them, "If it must be so, then do this: Take some of the best fruits of the land in your vessels and carry down a present for the man—a little balm and a little honey, spices and myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds. "Take double money in your hand, and take back in your hand the money that was returned in the mouth of your sacks; perhaps it was an oversight. "Take your brother also, and arise, go back to the man. "And may*

*God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may release your other brother and Benjamin. If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!"*

*-Genesis 43:8-14*

Although it is a small step forward, it is still a concrete step towards healing for Jacob. Notice, his recovery from regret is not found in validation for his emotions, nor is it found in direct comfort (not that either of these things are bad in themselves), but his recovery begins by him taking back responsibility, motivated by his son Judah. Although it would have been nice if Jacob was able to do this on his own and lead his sons, it is still good that he takes the rebuke of Judah and seeks to do the right thing.

But in response to his son's transformation, Jacob finally decides to stop focusing on the pain of his past and instead he starts looking at solutions for his future. It is this subtle, yet crucial, decision that begins to redeem this family. As we spoke about with individual PTSD, the solution is not to block out the past, nor is it to be consumed by the past, but, using the gift of faith, to believe in God's redemption of our past. I love a passage from the prophet Joel that so clearly illustrates this point:

*"So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..."*

*-Joel 2:25*

The "swarming locust" that is being spoken of in this passage was a plague that God sent to His own people as a result of their rebellion against Him. These ravenous insects had consumed all of the crops of Israel and produced a terrible famine within the land. I can honestly not think of a better analogy for regret than the swarm that God had sent. The fields of Israel represented their peace and their prosperity, the pride of the land that would provide for their future. However, all this prosperity was eaten up by a swarm of bugs, leaving the land desolate and without hope.

However, in response to the prayers of the people, God promises restoration, but it isn't the kind that most would expect. "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten..." Notice that God doesn't promise to restore the *crops* but the *years* that the locust had eaten. This strange promise contains for us an incredible hope. Unfortunately God can not restore to us the crops that we have lost. It would be nice if God were able to restore David's sons back to him, to rewind the clock and to prevent that terrible tragedy from ever occurring. In much the same way, it would be great if God could go back to prevent Joseph from being betrayed by his brothers and being sent to Egypt in the first place, but this isn't the promise of God.

God doesn't promise to restore what we have lost, because it is impossible to do that. Even if God gives his people new crops, these don't replace the ones that are lost. In

much the same way, current prosperity does not get rid of past suffering. Instead, God promises His people a redemption of *years*. What does this mean? It is far better than a promise to restore material goods to us or prevent a tragedy, instead it is a promise to take the regret of our past and work it towards the good of our future. That in eternity we could honestly say that not a moment of our lives, good or bad, was lost, but all have been redeemed and glorified in the kingdom of heaven. Just as the crucifixion of Christ is not unwritten in heaven, but instead it is redeemed and glorified, becoming the central point of our faith and the hope of our salvation, whatever is in our past that has caused us regret will be redeemed by this same power.

While God does promise comfort for those who mourn, and hope for those who are in despair, this remains God's primary promise for His people. That if we take our lives back up again, if we seek to be faithful to God in the life that we have been given, we have positioned ourselves correctly to see the redemption of our Lord. While God was working on the hearts of Jacob's sons to prove their repentance to Joseph, God was also working on the heart of Jacob so that he would be able to receive his son, seemingly back from the dead.

## Redeeming Hope

*"Then they went up out of Egypt, and came to the land of Canaan to Jacob their father. And they told him, saying, 'Joseph is still alive, and he is governor over all the land of Egypt.'" And Jacob's heart stood still, because he did not believe them. But when they told him all the words which Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts which Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of Jacob their father revived. Then Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die."*

*-Genesis 45:25-28*

Although Jacob meets the news from his sons with some well-deserved skepticism, his willingness to believe and come on the journey to Egypt with them is a testament to the work of God in his life. Once regret has become the norm for a person, hoping becomes a great difficulty:

*"Peace has been stripped away, and I have forgotten what prosperity is. I cry out, 'My splendor is gone! Everything I had hoped for from the LORD is lost!' The thought of my suffering and homelessness is bitter beyond words. I will never forget this awful time, as I grieve over my loss."*

*-Lamentations 3:17-20*

After Israel was destroyed by the invading Babylonian army, this is the cry that the prophet Jeremiah records for us. When calamity befalls us and prosperity is stripped

away, cynicism becomes easy and hope becomes painful. It would have been easy for Jacob to remain unmoved by the words of his sons or to harbor resentment towards them for their years of deception, but Jacob doesn't do this. Although we aren't told about the conversations that took place after this, Jacob's benediction towards his sons at the end of his life teaches us that genuine healing did happen in the family. Jacob opens himself back up to this hope, not through a closer examination of his circumstances, or through some naive self-assurance, but instead he trusts in the faithfulness of God. Just as Jeremiah confesses at the end of that same passage:

*"Yet I still dare to hope when I remember this: The faithful love of the LORD never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; his mercies begin afresh each morning. I say to myself, 'The LORD is my inheritance; therefore, I will hope in him!'"*  
-Lamentations 3:21-24

## Redeeming Responsibility

*"So Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. Then God spoke to Israel in the visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob!' And he said, 'Here I am.' So He said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not fear to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. 'I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes.'" Then Jacob arose from Beersheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the carts which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. So they took their livestock and their goods, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and went to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him. His sons and his sons' sons, his daughters and his sons' daughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt."*  
-Genesis 46:1-7

It is this hope that opens Jacob back up to the voice of God. Notice, in this passage Jacob is not called "Jacob", meaning "heel catcher", but he is again called Israel. After the death of Joseph, we don't see Jacob seeking the will of God anymore. He is too caught up in his self-pity and regret. This is the first time since Joseph went missing that he hears from God and is restored in his role of leading his family. From this moment to the end of his life, Jacob never again turns away from the voice of God. He courageously takes back up the responsibilities that God had given him and remains faithful to the call of God until he finally passes from the earth.

Even in his final benediction towards his sons in Genesis 49, we see Jacob functioning more like a prophet than merely their father. Although he does express his own desires towards his sons, and he finally does confront his sons about the sins of their past, he is

also clearly open to the voice of God and speaks some truly profound prophetic truths towards the future of his sons. This includes one of the most important prophecies contained for us in the book of Genesis:

*“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him shall be the obedience of the people.”*

*-Genesis 49:10*

Although the exact meaning of the title “Shiloh” is left a little ambiguous, both Christian and Jewish commentators alike all agree that this title is for the coming Messiah, the One who would fully redeem His people. Jacob here gives a prophecy that the coming of “Shiloh” would not only be from Judah’s line, but it would also come *before* governance was taken from Judah. After the establishment of David as the king of Israel, who himself was a descendant from Judah, every ruler of Israel descended from the line of David. This remained true until the eventual destruction of Israel by the Romans in AD 70. But, this passage proved true. The coming of Christ predated this destruction, prophecy was fulfilled, God was vindicated.

But this beautiful prophecy was only possible because of the willingness of Jacob to obey God and to be a faithful mouthpiece for the promises of God. Jacob was able to successfully recover from his regret and lead his family correctly. Even in death, he leads his family by giving them a final charge for his burial:

*“Then he charged them and said to them: “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, “in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. “There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. “The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth.” And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.”*

*-Genesis 49:29-33*

This promise was to remind his family that their true resting place was Israel and that God would eventually call them home.

## Redeeming The Past

*“The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of*

fools. Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this."

-Ecclesiastes 7:8-10

Although we have already talked about this point, I thought it would be good to end this paper on this thought. Jacob really did find the strength to trust in God's redemption of his past. This truth becomes more apparent in the following section where Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh.

*"And Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them." Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth." Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!'" And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. "Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."*

-Genesis 48:9-22

Not only does Jacob explicitly say: "*The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil...*", but he shows his faith in this incredible act. We are told that at this moment Jacob's eyes were dim and he was unable to see. This event then perfectly mirrors Jacob's own

life when his father's eyes were dim and he was supposed to bless Jacob but instead chose Esau. Jacob's mother used deception to "fix" her husband's error, but this one event, more than any other, tore apart the Jacob's family.

But at this moment, Jacob is in the same position of his own father, but makes the right decision. Instead of blessing the older in conformation to the customs and expectations of the society, Jacob heeds the voice of God and crosses his hands to bless the younger over the older. While there are many other examples to choose from in this story, this is a powerful moment when Jacob redeems his own past.

Instead of fixating on the tragedy of his past, he is beginning to see God's hand on him throughout his past. By seeing this point clearly, he is able to bless the children correctly and also to help his own son Joseph avoid the mistake of his father Isaac. We are told in the passage that Joseph was "displeased" by his father's decision, but Jacob sticks to the voice of God and helps his son avoid a mistake that could break apart his own family.

This is a difficult lesson to learn, but one that is crucial to our growth. It is important to emphasize that we are not supposed to receive from this the message that God was somehow pleased in the suffering of Jacob's past, or Joseph's for that matter. It isn't as though evil is something that God likes, since He is perfect God actually hates evil more than we do. But, it is also important to remember that God's power is such that He can *use* all things for His purposes including evil. God used the malice and greed of the Pharisees and the Romans to save all mankind through the cross, but this doesn't mean that God was *pleased* by their behavior. In the same way, it would be wrong for me to tell someone that God would be pleased by the suffering of their past, but it is equally wrong for me to ignore God's purposes within their past.

By submitting himself back to God, Jacob was able to learn and exemplify for his family this perfect lesson. Instead of being consumed by regret for his past, Jacob had learned the reality of God's perfect redemption of all things, including the most shameful and awful elements of our past. This is the power of God and by believing in it, we too can find freedom from our past regret and maintain hope in the purposes of God.

*"The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*

*-Romans 8:16-18*

