

# GENESIS—WEEK 36

## JACOB SETTLES DOWN



F. Michael Slay  
*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is Judah and Joseph by Arent de Gelder (1645–1727)  
Not on display anywhere; it's in a private collection.*

Jacob travels to Egypt with everything he has and finds a new home there. The nation of Israel is not settled in the land of Goshen. Jacob reaches the end of his life in peace. All seems well.

But things will not stay that way.

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Thank you.

Genesis 46:28–47:31 — Jacob Settles Down  
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1 Genesis 46:28–47:6 (ESV)

*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. 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. Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive.” 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. 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.’ When Pharaoh calls you and says, ‘What is your occupation?’ 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.”*

*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.” And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?” And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were.” 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.” Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you. 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.”*

This isn't deceptive; Jacob and his sons really are shepherds. That's almost surprising. Deception is a family tradition—especially when they're trying to protect themselves. Now, the truth protects them in a way that is strikingly similar to the way Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob *thought* their past deceptions would protect them.

Ironic, isn't it? This mocks the folly of lying. The failure of the previous deceptive schemes contrasts sharply with the simple success of truth-telling.

That's one of the basic lessons of the Bible—just tell the truth.

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Never underestimate the importance of basic lessons. This is one of the reasons why children's ministry is so important. The basic lessons that children learn mold their personalities. Kids grow up to be truthful because that's just the kind of people they are, not because they calculated that being truthful works best.

Support the children's ministry of your church, in prayer and in practice. Every church has the same struggles and the same prayer requests. Staffing is always a challenge. Finding a good curriculum is tricky. People get sick every week, and replacements are hard to find on short notice. It's never a dull moment.

Ask the LORD to bless this; it's important.

2 Genesis 47:7–12 (ESV)

*Then Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. And Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many are the days of the years of your life?” 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.” And Jacob blessed Pharaoh and went out from the presence of Pharaoh. 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. And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their dependents.*

When Jacob walks in to meet Pharaoh, he's in a very good mood; his eyes have just beheld his long-lost, favorite son. Then Jacob blesses Pharaoh—twice. Each one is much more than a simple, “Thank you.” There is ample evidence that Jacob takes blessings very seriously. Also, the Hebrew word used here is the same word used in Genesis 14:19 when Melchizedek blessed Abram and in Genesis 27:23 when Isaac blessed Jacob. Jacob may not know the whole back-story on how Joseph got promoted to his high position, but by now he surely knows that Joseph had been a slave. Jacob recognizes Pharaoh's wisdom.

In fact, Pharaoh comes across looking pretty good in this whole episode. Back in Chapter 41, he recognized Joseph's gift and gave him the greatest promotion in the history of man. That empowered Joseph to do the things that needed to be done. Pharaoh even referred to God by name while promoting Joseph, which is amazing given the Egyptian state religion. Now, his reaction to learning that Jacob and his sons are shepherds is to put them in charge of his own flocks. That's smart.

Jacob's blessing looks good; Pharaoh will be blessed indeed. Everything from here on will go amazingly well for him. As long as this Pharaoh is alive, life will be just dandy—for Egypt and for Israel.

And then it won't.

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This whole saga has been a great study in wisdom. Pharaoh didn't just figure things out; he paid attention and acted. Most importantly, he paid attention to others. He acted on the information that Jacob and his family are shepherds, just as he acted on Joseph's interpretation of his dream. That's wisdom.

Joseph's discernment was awesome because it was supernatural. He didn't figure anything out; it all came from God. That's a spectacular blessing, one which we'd all love to receive.

But notice that Joseph's gift for dream interpretation didn't always translate into wisdom. Though it turned out for the best in the end, it was unwise for Joseph to tell his brothers about his dreams. He showed great patience and faith at times, but his skills were not all-encompassing.

That's an important principle. Specific gifts and talents are separate. Unfortunately, we tend to view people with one impressive talent as somehow all-talented and all-knowing. That's why we're often subjected to movie stars weighing in on subjects (such as foreign policy) that they know nothing about.

3 Genesis 47:13–19 (ESV)

*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. 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. 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." And Joseph answered, "Give your livestock, and I will give you food in exchange for your livestock, if your money is gone." 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. 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. 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."*

Under Joseph's direction, Pharaoh has stored up enough food to last the full seven years. That wise investment saves the entire nation of Egypt (as well as the nascent nation of Israel). In the end, the people are saved, but they've traded everything they own for the food to stay alive. Pharaoh will possess everything.

Have Pharaoh's dream and Joseph's interpretation of that dream saved two nations?

Of course not; God saved two nations. The same God who created the famine, created the deliverance.

This would seem pointless and contradictory had we not been given a glimpse of God's higher purposes. God is teaching Joseph's brothers a great and painful lesson. He's also moving the nation of Israel to Egypt. Soon, that will look like a bad idea—as Israel will be enslaved.

More higher purposes to come.

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Recognizing God's higher purposes is the key to dealing with trials. Bad things happen. Sometimes we get to see why; sometimes we don't.

It's important to pay attention to those precious times when we do get to see something "bad" turn out for the best in the end. These are essential lessons in the limitations of our perspective. When we see things work out, it's useful to think back and recall the wrongheaded thoughts we had before we knew where things were headed.

We need to learn to laugh at our lack of understanding, patience, and trust. When truly learned, this lesson can see you through some pretty tough times. When everything seems wrong, it's comforting to remember that there's a lot we don't know.

4 Genesis 47:20–26 (ESV)

*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. As for the people, he made servants of them from one end of Egypt to the other. 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.*

*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. 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.” And they said, “You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh.” 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.*

Despite everything that has transpired, Pharaoh still supports the Egyptian priests.

They couldn't interpret his dream. They couldn't help with the famine. They don't seem useful for anything. Yet they are the only Egyptians that end up with any land. Obviously, Pharaoh's understanding falls short of full religious conversion.

This is a recurring theme in the Bible. Many people seem to “get it,” but they're only friends of God's kingdom—not members. They won't commit to the “full Rahab” and go all in for God. This is, for example, the difference between Elimelech and Ruth. Ruth puts everything on the line for the LORD, but Elimelech bolts Israel at the first sign of famine.

Close counts in horseshoes, not faith.

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We have the same problem today. Many so-called Christians are merely friendly with Christianity. They wear the symbols and talk the talk, but they're not really committed. They would never make a big sacrifice or take a risk for Jesus. They don't see their sin. They aren't horrified by their sin. They don't think they need help. They think everything is just hunky dory—but it's not. They shouldn't be surprised when Jesus ultimately says to them, “*I never knew you.*”

*It is impossible for a man to learn what he thinks he already knows.* — Epictetus

That's a wise saying, but it doesn't exactly apply to saving faith. Weak Christians generally *are* destined to eternal life; they will grow in their commitment to what they thought they were already fully committed to. Our task is to seek out and help these people.

But there's one more twist. These people are easy to find; just look in the mirror. You and I are not as fully committed as we can be either. There are countless levels of sanctification.

Those levels are more about being “all in” than they are about improved behavior.

5 Genesis 47:27–31 (ESV)

*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. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were 147 years.*

*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, 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.” And he said, “Swear to me”; and he swore to him. Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.*

Israel has walked the whole road—from snake to saint. He has seen his favorite son lost and seen him found. He has watched Joseph’s older brothers go from murderers to penitents.

Now he comes to the end, and he’s focused like a laser beam on the covenant. He knows where his true home is and he insists on being buried there. He doesn’t say “please” with this one; he exacts a pledge.

Jacob wasn’t particularly faithful to God; God was faithful to Jacob. Over the span of almost a century and a half, the LORD taught Jacob, painfully, what it means to be a man of God. To his credit, Jacob didn’t resist or ignore the lessons.

He wasn’t a great student, but at least he didn’t cut class.

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It’s the same with us. God knows He’s teaching sinners. We don’t start out as saints; we’re saints in training. We’re merely expected to stay in school. That a pretty low standard, but we struggle with it.

A church is a school. We tend to think of this in terms of the children’s Sunday School program, but churches educate all kinds of Christians, new as well as mature. They need to offer a range of things to stimulate their congregations (and the whole community) to learn and grow in Christ. It’s a tough job.

The challenge with adults is that their level of knowledge varies so much. With a Sunday School program for third graders, you have a good idea what they know and you can design a curriculum for them.

But adults are all over the map. Some are beginners, while others are anything but. How can you design a curriculum for that?

You almost can’t. If a church is large enough, multiple “tracks” can offer something for everyone.

Churches need to be more intentional about this. Assess the “students” and then figure out how to best move people forward. This can get as serious as a Greek or Hebrew class on Wednesday nights. That’s not a specific suggestion; it’s just food for thought.

I’ve seen it done though.

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. What's the most important lesson you learned as a child?
2. Name a great person who, nevertheless, had a great fault.
3. When have you misread where things were headed? Did you pray for the wrong things?
4. How can you tell the difference between real faith and "almost faith"?
5. What's the best way to offer advanced training to Christians? In church or online?