

# FAMOUS LAST WORDS

## VAYECHI

Genesis 47:28-50:26

### Cast of Characters

Son  
Father  
Daughter  
Mother  
Jacob  
Joseph  
Manasseh  
Ephraim  
Reuben  
Levi  
Judah

**SON:** I'm so hungry, I can't wait to eat Shabbat Dinner.

**FATHER:** It's not time to eat yet. First comes my favorite part of Shabbat.

**DAUGHTER:** You mean, you're going to take a nap now?

**FATHER:** No. My favorite part of Shabbat is when I get to bless you, my children.

**MOTHER:** Let's say the blessing. *(She places her hands on her daughter's head.)* "May you be like Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel." *(She places her hands on her son's head.)* "May you be like Ephraim and Manasseh."

**DAUGHTER:** Wait a second. Everybody knows who Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah are . . .

**SON:** Yeah. They're the girls in my Hebrew School class.

**MOTHER:** They are also the names of the Matriarchs, the mothers of the Jewish people.

**DAUGHTER:** But who are Ephraim and Manasseh?

**SON:** And why should I be like them?

**FATHER:** That's a good question.

**MOTHER:** And the answer is in this week's parashah, Vayechi.

**DAUGHTER:** *(To her brother.)* Why do I get the feeling we won't be eating for a while?

**FATHER:** Jacob is very old and still living in Egypt with his children. He realizes he is dying and calls for his son, Joseph.

*(Jacob enters with Joseph.)*

**JACOB:** Joseph, is that you?

**JOSEPH:** Yes, Father. Can't you see me?

**JACOB:** I'm having some trouble with my sight. You know what they say — after you hit 140, everything starts to go.

**JOSEPH:** We should get you some glasses.

**JACOB:** No need to bother. I don't think I'll be around much longer.

**JOSEPH:** Oh, Father. How can you be sure?

**JACOB:** Let's just say, God and I are close. I know these things.

**JOSEPH:** Is there anything I can do for you?

**JACOB:** I have only one request — to be buried in Canaan next to my parents, Isaac and Rebekah, and my grandparents, Abraham and Sarah.

**JOSEPH:** I will make sure of it.

**JACOB:** I also want you to bring your son Manasseh to see me.  
**JOSEPH:** Sure.

**JACOB:** And the other one, Ephraim.

**JOSEPH:** I thought you said you had one request?

**JACOB:** That's it. Just bring me Ephraim and Manasseh. And your brothers. And a cup of tea.

**JOSEPH:** No problem. (*He starts to go, then stops and turns to Jacob.*) Herbal or regular?

**JACOB:** Make it herbal . . . with lemon . . . and a touch of goat milk . . . and Sweet and Low.

(*While Jacob is talking, Joseph brings in Ephraim and Manasseh.*)

**JOSEPH:** Here they are, Dad.

**JACOB:** Which one is which — it's hard for me to see.

**MANASSEH:** I am Manasseh, the oldest.

**EPHRAIM:** I am Ephraim, the youngest.

**JOSEPH:** So that means you need to bless Manasseh with the right hand and Ephraim with the left hand.

**JACOB:** Okay. (*Jacob puts his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's head.*) Now, let's begin.

**JOSEPH:** Dad, you have it backwards. You're giving the blessing for the oldest child to Ephraim, but Manasseh is the older one. Let me switch them for you.

**JACOB:** Joseph, I may be blind, but I'm not stupid. I want to give the greater blessing to the younger child.

**EPHRAIM:** Grandpa, is that because you were the younger child and you received the blessing instead of Uncle Esau?

**MANASSEH:** Ephraim, you shouldn't say such things. (*To Jacob.*) But he does have a point. Is that why you're doing it backwards?

**JACOB:** Both boys will be the fathers of great tribes. But Ephraim's tribe will be even bigger.

**MANASSEH:** Whatever. I'm not complaining.

**EPHRAIM:** Thanks a lot, Grandpa!

**JACOB:** In the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac, may your descendants grow and flourish. May generations to come continue to bless their children saying, "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."

**JOSEPH:** Father, why did you choose to bless my sons as if they were your own?

**JACOB:** Many reasons. But most of all, because of your loyalty to me. And these children have been loyal to you, as well. They have remained proud of being Jewish, even here in Egypt. They deserve to be rewarded. So I've decided to give as much of my inheritance to them as I give to your own brothers.

**JOSEPH:** Here come my brothers now.

(*Reuben, Levi, and Judah enter.*)

**JACOB:** But there are only three of them — unless my eyesight is worse than I thought.

**REUBEN:** This is a low budget production. And we're on a time schedule.

**LEVI:** This is a short play, not a mini-series. Do you know how long it would take to give out 12 blessings?

**JACOB:** Which one is Reuben, my oldest?

**REUBEN:** That would be me, oh wonderful and generous father of mine. Which means I get the most, right?

**JACOB:** I've decided to do things differently. I've never really been into the firstborn thing anyway. You have many good qualities. But you don't always do the right thing. You will get a portion equal to that of your brothers.

**LEVI:** What about me, Levi?

**JACOB:** You and Simeon have been very violent and have hurt people. Your children will not be as powerful as the others.

**REUBEN:** (*To Levi.*) Compared to you, my blessing wasn't so bad . . .

**LEVI:** Very funny. How will I tell Simeon the news? He can be very violent and he hurts people.

**JUDAH:** So I've heard.

**JACOB:** Judah, you are next. Are you ready?

**JUDAH:** After those other blessings, I'm not so sure.

**JACOB:** You have no reason to be afraid. You have been as courageous as a lion. Your children will be noble and powerful.

**JUDAH:** Sounds good to me.

(*Jacob, Joseph, Reuben, Levi, and Judah exit.*)

**FATHER:** And Jacob blessed all his children that day . . .

**MOTHER:** And when he died, Jacob was buried in Canaan.

**SON:** Wow. That's why you want me to be like Manasseh and Ephraim.

**FATHER:** Yes. They were good and noble children.

**DAUGHTER:** What happened after Jacob died?

**FATHER:** That's an interesting question.

**MOTHER:** When Jacob died, Joseph's brothers were worried.  
(*Reuben, Levi, Judah, and Joseph enter.*)

**REUBEN:** Joseph, we're worried.

**LEVI:** Now that dad is no longer alive, are you going to try to get back at us for that little thing we did to you?

**JUDAH:** You know, that silly prank with the pit and your coat?

**JOSEPH:** You meant to hurt me, but things worked out for the best. We had a good life in Egypt and managed to survive the famine. I love you and I forgive you.

(*Biblical characters freeze on stage.*)

**MOTHER:** So you see, the story ends happily.

**DAUGHTER:** And what happens in the next Torah portion?

**FATHER:** We begin the Book of Exodus.

**SON:** And we'll hear about that next time. Now, let's eat!