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DEATH AND LEGACY IN THE TANACH

CHELSEA FEUCHS

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Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

School of Rabbinic Studies

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Advisor: Dr. Adriane Leveen

ABSTRACT

Death is a subject often avoided in contemporary Western culture, but in order to come to terms with mortality and pass on meaningful legacies, we must contemplate existential and sometimes disconcerting questions. Luckily, Jewish tradition includes many resources that can help spark both individual thought and interpersonal conversation. This thesis examines the deaths of several figures in the Tanach, reviewing each story in its particularities and then drawing comparisons among them to uncover lessons that can speak to contemporary readers. Nine stories are included—the deaths of Jacob, Aaron, David, Isaac, Moses, Joshua, Rachel, Er, and Jonathan—each translated with annotations and read in light of other biblical commentaries, primarily the works of modern biblical scholars. Over three chapters, this thesis moves from the most ideal conditions for meeting death and passing on a legacy to more flawed and difficult circumstances. Although our world is different from that of our ancestors, many aspects of the human condition remain the same, and there is wisdom in these ancient stories that can provide guidance for approaching the end of life with intention, dignity, and understanding.

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INTRODUCTION

As a child, I had a lot of questions about death and how to live a meaningful life in the face of mortality. Because I was relatively young when I started to ask about these things, they did not feel like appropriate topics to raise among my peers. When I tried to approach adults with my questions, most shifted uncomfortably or responded with vague platitudes. It was only when speaking to religious leaders, rabbis and ministers in the Jewish and Unitarian Universalist communities in which I grew up, that I was taken seriously. They did not offer any absolute answers, but they floated some ideas, added depth to my questions, and projected an air of comfort when talking about mortality that I envied as a young person who was just beginning to understand the inevitability of death. The example these clergy people set ensured that religion became a cornerstone of my identity, beloved because it welcomed my most challenging and mystifying and personal thoughts. Many years later, now deeply entrenched in my Jewish tradition and on the precipice of becoming a rabbi myself, I aspire to create space for others to ask big questions and to provide guidance in the search for incomplete yet meaningful answers.

Given my decades-long fascination with death, perhaps the first part of my thesis title, “Death and Legacy,” is unsurprising. However, the full title is “Death and Legacy in the Tanach,” and this second part deserves some explanation. The first time I interacted with the Torah in a serious, reverent, and academic manner was in college. Previously, it had been a source of children’s stories and a symbol of Judaism, but I knew little of its real content. In the midst of several hardships that occurred while I was in college, my Hillel rabbi suggested we look at this or that story in the Tanach that mirrored my experiences. It was the most comforting thing in the world to see these troubles echoed in my sacred text, to know that no challenge was too intense or obscure to be reflected in the history of my people. Thus, my love of Tanach was born, and it grew as I read the text in full, discussed it in *chevruta*, and analyzed commentary after commentary. I am more convinced every

day of the holiness of this text and its relevance in modern times, of the power of recognizing oneself in the Tanach and feeling recognized in turn.

This thesis is a marriage of these two longstanding interests. Everyone who is inclined to think about mortality, who wonders how to craft and pass on a legacy, deserves guidance from their inherited tradition. For those who consider the Torah and the Tanach part of their sacred library, there is no shortage of content regarding death and legacy. Because the Tanach is infamously laconic, many figures do not receive a formal death scene, and others are reported in just a verse or two. However, there are plenty of stories, some long and others short, that portray our ancestors reaching the end of life and working to pass on core teachings and values. This does not mean, though, that any figure does a perfect job approaching this final stage of life. The Tanach does not ever depict infallible people, sharing the shortcomings of even our most esteemed patriarchs, matriarchs, and leaders. While holding out several versions of the ideal way to meet death and bequeath a legacy, we also read of the anxieties, failings, and vulnerabilities of those who came before. This thesis will begin with the ideal, though imperfect, stories, and then explore progressively difficult or distressing situations.

Chapter 1 is titled “Crafting a Legacy with Intention and Authority: Lessons from the Deaths of Patriarchs, Priests, and Monarchs,” and it focuses on Jacob, Aaron, and King David. All three men are aware of their impending deaths, and they face the end with dignity, maintaining a level of control over those nearby. They are treated with reverence by their families, receiving several forms of reassurance that their last wishes will be honored and their values have been understood. As each one also fills an important leadership role, they also must select one or more successors to help ensure the continuity of their line and their people. All three manage to do so, and they help their favored sons assume these positions of authority before passing away. Given that death is inescapable, Jacob, Aaron, and David present models for the most respectable and optimal

circumstances to face mortality. Even still, it can be difficult to read their stories, to see such powerful figures confront immovable boundaries. And even still, their final scenes are not free from disappointment and pain, loved ones who are absent, grudges that simply cannot be let go. The ideal is not perfect, but these stories still offer readers guidance for approaching death and legacy thoughtfully, and they show the benefit of acknowledging one's mortality and making thoughtful plans for the end of life.

The title of chapter 2 is "Doubts and Limitations in Death and Legacy: Even Great Leaders Grapple with Shortcomings," and its subjects are Isaac, Moses, and Joshua. These figures struggle quite openly with the limitations that mortality imposes, namely that they cannot guarantee their wishes will be respected as they age and pass away. They are vulnerable, dependent on the respect and actions of others to uphold their legacies and execute their end-of-life decisions. Isaac, Moses, and Joshua are no strangers to this sense of vulnerability, experiencing their limitations years earlier; whether due to the *Akeidah*, the Israelites going astray, or the failure to conquer the entire Promised Land, each man knows long before he dies how much lays outside of his control. This knowledge does not prevent them from attempting to bless and charge their successors, passing on their values and imparting vital lessons. These stories are more challenging to read than those in chapter 1, given that they focus on honorable leaders confronting the boundaries of their influence and abilities. Still, they are deeply relatable, because we are all essentially dependent on others as we age, face death, and attempt to leave a lasting legacy. The medical or funeral plans we make may encounter unexpected obstacles, the advice we give may not be heeded, and values we impart may not be relevant in every situation or generation. By seeing even our greatest leaders struggle but find partial solutions, we can better confront our own limitations and arrange for the end of life with a combination of hope and realism.

The most challenging situations are presented in chapter 3, “Co-Creating a Legacy for Those Gone Too Soon: The Earnest Yet Flawed Responses of Loved Ones,” which focuses on the deaths of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan. Each of these figures passes away at an age of peak productivity and vitality, when they should be building up households. Cut down in the prime of life, their loved ones are left to grieve not only the person themselves, but also their lost potential. We might expect such tragedies to inspire total respect for the needs and memories of the dead, but this turns out not to be the case. Jacob buried Rachel beside the road, Judah initially refused to uphold Er’s name by mistreating his widow Tamar, and David recited a politically motivated elegy for Jonathan. The reality is that the concerns, needs, and shortcomings of the living do not simply disappear out of respect for the dead. As difficult as this is to see in our sacred texts, it can also provide some reassurance. The pressures of memorializing a person who dies young are immense, and their loved ones may set unachievable standards for themselves. By presenting the flawed actions of our ancestors, the Tanach reassures readers today that one need not mourn “perfectly” in order to help create a legacy for those gone too soon.

Some of the stories examined in this thesis bear little resemblance to modern times in their specific details. Elderly priests rarely climb mountains before their death like Aaron; blind patriarchs are not duped by the touch and smell of animal skins like Isaac; the law of levirate marriage meant to uphold Er’s name is no longer part of Jewish practice. Still, the basic challenges of confronting mortality and imparting a legacy have not changed in thousands of years. We all hope to be respected at the end of life, to see in some way that our plans for the future will be honored. We all know that so much lays beyond our control, and feel doubtful and vulnerable as a result. We all recognize that respect for the dead is an important value, but it sometimes competes with the needs of the living. My greatest hope is that these scenes from the Tanach are relatable to readers

today, allowing them to feel seen and understood, and providing some form of guidance and reassurance as thoughtful people attempt to answer life's biggest questions.

CHAPTER ONE**Crafting a Legacy with Intention and Authority:****Lessons from the Deaths of Patriarchs, Priests, and Monarchs**Introduction

Some say death is the great equalizer, and in many ways that is true. No matter how much money, power, or prestige a person accrues in their lifetime, they will eventually face mortality. This fate has awaited human beings since creation, and it is shared by nearly all biblical figures.¹ However, just because people meet the same end does not mean that they do so in the same way. Some deaths are better than others, and not only because they come at the end of long and fulfilling lives. Approaching death with a sense of purpose and being heeded by others are key, because they allow people to express their final wishes with confidence that they will be respected. Thus, part of what makes for a good death is the ability of the dying person to communicate their legacy with intention and authority. Meeting these standards is increasingly rare in modern times, as medical advancements can sustain life long after a person has lost the capacity for recollection or conversation. Even without such interventions, though, achieving a good death is and was both difficult and rare. Throughout the Tanach, many figures enjoy long and prosperous lives, but relatively few pass away under optimal circumstances. Three men,² Jacob, Aaron, and David, managed to approach death and transmit legacies with intention and authority, and their final scenes will be the subject of this thesis chapter. By examining these three stories from the Tanach and pulling out lessons on what makes for a good death, we invite our ancient tradition to speak to

¹ The one possible exception being the prophet Elijah, who in II Kings 2:11 is taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and may not have died, as we understand death, in the process.

² It is notable that all three figures examined here are male. The same will be true in chapter two of this thesis, although chapter three will focus on several women. Not all characters are granted deathbed scenes, and those who are generally serve as leaders in a traditional and narrow sense of the word, as heads of families, religious institutions, or a nation. As a woman and a feminist, it is disappointing to me to see the deaths of women in my sacred texts go either unnoted or minimally reported. This may be fertile ground for modern midrash, as well as future study.

modern readers, proposing answers to life's most difficult existential questions with wisdom that has withstood the test of time.

It should be noted that a prerequisite for crafting a legacy and passing it on deliberately is an acceptance of one's mortality. In the stories of Jacob, Aaron, and David, all three men know of their impending deaths and act based on that insight. It appears that Hebrew standards matched those of the Greeks because both cultures saw awareness of one's immanent death as ideal.³ As Dr. Kerry D. Lee notes, this view differs from modern norms, which "place a higher priority on the good (that is, painless) death than on the noble death, so that the painless and peaceful death while sleeping is seen to be an ideal way to die. But ancients felt that to die unaware in one's sleep was one of the worst ways to die. It was better to meet death face on."⁴ Wherever one falls on the issue of noble versus painless death, a return to bygone standards is not necessary to draw lessons from ancient texts. Today, it may not be desirable or even possible to know that death is near, but acknowledging the inevitability of death at earlier and healthier stages of life allows a person to face it with intention and authority. Crafting a legacy, culling important insights from lived experiences, passing on skills and knowledge, arranging burial logistics, and communicating desires for future generations can all be done well before the onset of illness or the day of death. In outlining the stories of three good deaths in the Tanach, my purpose is not to lift up an unachievable standard, but rather to identify feasible and desirable parallels for contemporary readers.

Story Outlines

I will now turn to outlining the stories in question individually before offering a meta-analysis of all three. However, a few notes are necessary before proceeding. First, there is no

³ Kerry D. Lee, Jr., *The Death of Jacob: Narrative Conventions in Genesis 47.28-50.26* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 228.

⁴ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 228.

substitute for reading the texts themselves, ideally in Hebrew but also with the help of multiple translations. I recommend that anyone interested in this chapter read the scenes as canonized and review my annotated translations before reading the summaries and interpretations that follow. Second, any time I divide a text into separate scenes, this is as much a matter of imposing order as perceiving it; there are textual and logical reasons to establish boundaries between units,⁵ but no modern interpreter can say that their divisions are unquestionably correct. Third, there is considerable variation in the length of the three narratives; all are significant and will yield valuable lessons, but some will benefit from the inclusion of greater detail as compared to others. Finally, this work is not focused on questions of biblical authorship; issues of historical context, political motivation, and linguistic differences will arise, but they are not at the heart of my analysis. With those words of caution and clarification, we can now turn to the deathbed scenes of Jacob, Aaron, and David, who all approach the end of life and the transmission of legacy with intention and authority.

Jacob

The patriarch Jacob has the lengthiest death and legacy story examined in this chapter, and indeed one of the longest in the Tanach. While boundaries are not absolute, three different scenes can be identified in this narrative based on the audience Jacob addresses. First, he speaks to his favored son Joseph, then to Joseph and his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim, and finally to all twelve sons. Although Jacob does not begin speaking to Joseph until Genesis 47:29, verse 28 is included as a prelude to the narrative because it “contains the detail of Jacob’s total lifespan, and this sort of detail does not elsewhere occur in Genesis (or, indeed, in Hebrew narrative, generally) outside the

⁵ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 65.

context of a death narrative or report.”⁶ Thus, by reviewing the final sojourning place and span of Jacob’s life, this statement alerts the reader that his deathbed scene is beginning.

In the first scene, Jacob calls to Joseph and asks that he take an oath to bring his body up from Egypt for burial in the family’s gravesite in Canaan. Even though Jacob issued the summons to Joseph and occupies the honored role of father and patriarch, he is notably deferential to his son; three times in the burial request he repeats the word *אני*, translated in context as “pray,” meaning “please,” and adding in the supplicating phrase “if I have found favor in your eyes” (Genesis 47:29). As much as Jacob is addressing his son, he is also speaking to the grand vizier and second most powerful man in Egypt; this status may be part of why Joseph is entrusted to execute the burial request in the first place, but it creates an unexpected power imbalance between father and son. Joseph says to his father, “I will do as you have spoken” (Genesis 47:30). This initial response can be read in two ways; Joseph might be emphasizing the weight that Jacob’s words carry, or he might be intentionally stopping short of swearing an official oath. Whatever the case, Jacob urges him to swear, and Joseph acquiesces. Jacob then bows at the head of the bed, perhaps in gratitude, or perhaps due to a release of anxiety that could only come after securing this binding commitment. This image of a father bowing to his son, even if such a movement is minimal enough to be done in bed, also contributes to the unexpected power dynamic between the two. Whatever tensions or imbalances may exist in this moment, it is still clear how significant it is for Jacob to express his wishes and receive assurances that they will be fulfilled by a dutiful descendant.

The second scene (Genesis 48:1-22) unfolds after an undefined amount of time has passed, when someone informs Joseph that his father is ill, prompting him to visit with his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob is then informed of Joseph’s arrival, and he strengthens himself enough to sit up in his bed. Thus, even though Joseph initiated the visit, Jacob physically expresses openness to their

⁶ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 69.

presence, and he then takes control of the interaction. Jacob recalls the promises made to him by God and states that he will adopt Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, a prerequisite in the ancient world for bequeathing an inheritance.⁷ To Joseph's displeasure, Jacob flips the order of the boys and gives Ephraim, the younger, a greater blessing than Manasseh, the older. There is some irony in Joseph's reaction because at that moment he is essentially receiving the double portion granted by primogeniture to the eldest brother despite being the eleventh son born to his father. Reading Joseph more generously, he already suffered the worst consequences of his father's favoritism and his family's tradition of unseating the firstborn, and he may seek to save the next generation from these complications. However, impending death does not necessarily bring about change or insight, and Jacob repeats his pattern of preferencing one child over another, specifically the younger over the older.

The third scene (Genesis 49:1-33) follows shortly after the second, enough time that the audience can expand to include all of Jacob's sons, but not too long because Jacob stated he was about to die in Genesis 48:21. In the first part of this scene, Jacob addresses each son individually, but the nature of what he says is unclear. According to Genesis 49:1, Jacob is sharing "אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא" that which will befall" them, meaning perhaps a vision or premonition, but Genesis 49:28 states three times that Jacob shared blessings, even though many of his statements are angry and sharp. Given the combination of positive and negative statements, reviews of the past and predictions for the future, and character assessments, it is not possible to find just one word to describe Jacob's speech. It is clear that Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Issachar are judged while Judah and Joseph are esteemed, and the other sons receive mild to favorable reflections. Despite these individual variations, Jacob relays his burial instructions to his twelve sons. This may grant them each some

⁷ Millar Burrows, "The Ancient Oriental Background of Hebrew Levirate Marriage," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 77 (February 1940): 5.

level of *kavod*, being entrusted with their father's final wishes no matter how bitterly they hurt or disappointed him in life. It may also be the case that Jacob has not fully let go of his anxiety around burial. Or, read most sympathetically, Jacob may have wanted his last words to address his sons equally and put them all on the same page, avoiding the favoritism and conflicts that characterized so much of their time together. On this somewhat unifying last note, finally Jacob gathers his feet into the bed and dies.

Aaron

The leader and High Priest Aaron has the shortest death and legacy story examined in this thesis chapter, so much so that it can be read as one scene. Numbers 20:22 situates the reader in the Israelites' wilderness journey and introduces the site where Aaron will die, Mount Hor. Adonai then speaks to both Aaron and Moses, informing them of Aaron's impending death due to their rebellion at the Waters of Meribah. Although God refers to Aaron in the third person while relaying his fate, Numbers 20:23 clearly states that Aaron was being addressed alongside Moses, making his composure in the face of punishment and mortality that much more striking. Although Aaron's death conveys a warning that even God's servants are not above retribution when they err, the scene is not excessively punitive. God still grants Aaron a long life, a death surrounded by close family, and the assurance of symbolically passing on his legacy. Following God's instructions, Moses, Aaron and his son Elazar ascend the mountain in the sight of the Israelite congregation. There, Moses strips Aaron of his garments and places them on Elazar, Aaron dies, and the two others descend. The whole community bewails Aaron's passing for thirty days, a complete period of mourning.

While Numbers 20:22-29 is the most complete account of Aaron's death, it is not the only one in the Torah. Both Numbers 33:38-39 and Deuteronomy 10:6 refer to Aaron's passing, each with

some additional or different information. Numbers 33 includes the precise day of Aaron's death as well as his total lifespan, details generally given at the death of a significant character but missing from the Numbers 20 account.⁸ Numbers 33:38 states that Aaron died in the fortieth year following the Exodus, marking a complete transition between generations, and highlighting his full term of service to the community. Numbers 33:39 mentions Aaron's one-hundred-and-twenty-three-year lifespan, a remarkable age that stands in stark contrast to many other characters in Numbers who were cut down prematurely for their rebellions. True, Aaron died as a result of his misstep, but in many ways it was also his time. Deuteronomy 10:6 changes place names, saying the Israelites journeyed from Beeroth-Bene-Jaakan toward Moserah, rather than from Kadesh to Mount Hor. It is possible that two divergent traditions have been preserved in these sources; it may also be the case that because the Israelites were in the wilderness and uninterested in claiming that land, insisting on a particular burial site for their dead was less important.⁹ This stands in stark contrast to Jacob's deathbed story, in which the patriarch repeatedly details his desired burial site, and recounts the story of Abraham purchasing the land. Still, the slightly different accounts in Numbers 33 and Deuteronomy 10 do not contradict the story of Aaron's death in Numbers 20 as it unfolded between him, Moses, Elazar, and the Israelite community.

David

An argument could be made that David's death and legacy story begins at I Kings 1:1 and continues to I Kings 3 and beyond, as Solomon establishes his rule and deals with people according to his father's graces and grudges. However, for the purposes of this thesis chapter, I will begin my close examination with I Kings 1:28 because this is the verse in which David transforms from a

⁸ Adriane Leveen, *Memory and Tradition in the Book of Numbers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 43.

⁹ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 159.

passive to an active character. I chose to end this examination with I Kings 2:12 because it directly follows the death of David and serves as a confirmation that David's legacy was successfully passed on to his chosen heir, Solomon. Preceding I Kings 1:28, readers are informed that David's health is declining, and his son Adonijah is preparing to become king, albeit in a premature and unsanctioned manner. Fearing for her life and that of her son, Bathsheba confers with the prophet Nathan, and the two devise a plan to ensure that Solomon will become king. Some view their plan as a deceptive scheme meant to dupe an ailing old man,¹⁰ but others think Adonijah's upstart behavior marks him as unworthy of the throne, while the actions of two such trusted agents prove Solomon is the proper successor.¹¹ Although the argument that David is being played and Adonijah had every right as the eldest living son to assume he would become king is interesting, the success and Divine favor enjoyed by Solomon throughout his reign support the traditional view that he was the right man to sit upon the throne.

The first scene, according to the interests of this thesis chapter, begins with I Kings 1:28, as the focus shifts from others acting upon David to David taking control of the action. This change is quite surprising given that at the beginning of I Kings 1 David is portrayed as an ailing man who has lost his vigor, evidenced by his lack of interest or ability to pursue a sexual relationship with Abishag the Shunammite. He also seems unaware of the machinations of Adonijah, just the latest in a series of sons who challenge David's power and demonstrate that his control over his household and kingdom is not absolute. Despite all this, after hearing Nathan's report, David authoritatively responds. He calls Bathsheba to his bedside and swears by Adonai that he will fulfill his promise to make Solomon king that very day. Bathsheba bows and shows both deference and gratitude to David. He then calls in three men of authority, Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah

¹⁰ David Marcus, "David the Deceiver and David the Dupe," *Prooftexts* 6, no. 2 (May 1986): 166.

¹¹ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 32.

son of Jehoaida, a military commander. David instructs them to make Solomon king over Israel and Judah, and they follow his orders faithfully. There is then a great and raucous celebration in response to this coronation ceremony.

In the second scene, I Kings 1:41-53, the sound of Solomon's supporters reaches Adonijah's quarters, and the text moves from the rightful royal heir to his challenger. News arrives that Solomon has been made king, following the wishes of David, with the help of proper leaders and symbols. Jonathan, the messenger, heaps on additional descriptions, three times saying "And what is more..." before delivering another detail of the Solomon's ascension to power. Interestingly, I Kings 1:46-48 relays Solomon's enthronement, the wish that Solomon shall surpass David in greatness, and David bowing and blessing the proceedings. Those details were not previously communicated by the text, and it is a fascinating choice to invite the reader to see this scene unfold through the eyes of Adonijah. The fear in his camp becomes explicit when in response to this report Adonijah's guests flee from his company, and he himself grasps hold of the altar as a safe place where his blood cannot be shed. Solomon then agrees to a conditional oath that he will not kill Adonijah if he proves to be a valiant, rather than an evil, man. After Adonijah bows to his half-brother, he is sent back home.

The final scene considered here begins with I Kings 2:1, when the attention shifts back to David and his final words to Solomon. Like Jacob and Aaron, David is aware that his time is drawing to an end, which prompts a meaningful interaction with his son. He provides guidance and advises Solomon to be mindful of the Divine commandments. Not only will this allow Solomon to be successful, but it will also ensure that the promise God made to keep David's offspring on the throne will be fulfilled. Rather than ending with this pious message, though, David continues to speak and reviews significant events in his life that led to feelings of both loyalty and enmity. He charges Solomon to exact revenge on his enemies, including one man David personally promised to spare,

using Solomon as a kind of loophole and executioner. Unfortunately, just as Jacob struggled to break his earlier habits regarding favoritism when he was on his deathbed, the same is true for David and his penchant for enlisting others to do his dirty work. Finally, David dies and is buried with his ancestors, followed by a statement of his long life and reign, and Solomon's firm grasp on the throne.

Intertextual Parallels, Intergenerational Lessons

Just as no figure in the Tanach is infallible, so too no death in the Tanach is perfect. Still, Jacob, Aaron, and David all share the good fortune of meeting their ends and passing on their legacies with intention and authority. Precisely how those descriptors manifest in each story varies, but there are commonalities among their experiences. What follows are four elements these stories share. By tracking parallels in the biblical text, modern readers can identify some features of a “good death” and hopefully find ways to replicate and adapt them, allowing the wisdom of the past to speak across generations.

Demonstrating Independence and Ability

Given that Jacob, Aaron and David all die at old ages, one might think they would be portrayed as frail and even passive as death approaches. It is true that Jacob and David both lay in bed ill, but all three men demonstrate a remarkable level of independence and ability in their final days.

a. Jacob

Jacob demonstrates independence in all three scenes that comprise his death and legacy story. In the first scene, Jacob is aware that his days are numbered, “וַיִּקְרָא לְבָנָו לְיוֹסֵף” so he called to his son Joseph” (Genesis 47:29). By summoning Joseph to his bedside, Jacob shows that he retains

some level of control. According to Lee, a summoning is a “show of initiative by the dying character [that] shows mental alertness, and this may be intended to connote an honourable death.”¹²

Demonstrating some command is particularly important in this moment because Jacob is asking for an oath regarding his burial, which by nature requires the help of others to fulfill. Jacob acts as the initiator again in scene three, this time with many more people “וַיִּקְרָא יַעֲקֹב אֶל-בָּנָיו” Then, Jacob called to his sons” (Genesis 49:1). Rather than insist on a sworn oath, though, Jacob commands (וַיִּצַּו) all his sons regarding his burial and does not ask for their assent. This may be because he already has assurances from Joseph, the son with the most authority to ensure his instructions are properly carried out, but by using the word וַיִּצַּו Jacob indicates a level of confidence in his authority.

Nowhere is Jacob’s independence more clearly communicated than in scene two, when Joseph visits with Manasseh and Ephraim. Despite being ill, “וַיַּחֲזֶק יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיָּשֶׁב עַל-הַמֶּטָּה” Israel strengthened himself and sat up in bed” (Genesis 48:2) when his son and grandsons arrived. Then, in defiance of Joseph’s careful positioning, Jacob crosses his hands while blessing Ephraim and Manasseh. When Joseph explicitly objects and tries physically to correct his father, Jacob refuses and repeats, “יָדָעְתִּי בְנִי יִדְעָתִי” I know, my son, I know” (Genesis 48:19), making clear that he is in control of his faculties and decisions, and that he remains the father and Joseph the son. Thus, in each scene Jacob approaches death not as a weak man, but as a powerful and self-assured patriarch.

b. Aaron

As previously stated, Aaron’s death and legacy scene is significantly shorter than the others, so there are fewer opportunities to show his independence. Still, Aaron is remarkably self-possessed as he approaches death, in ways that are both explicit and implicit to the text. At the age of one hundred and twenty-three, Aaron helps to lead the people on yet another leg of their journey, from

¹² Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 77.

Kadesh to Mount Hor according to the Numbers sources, or from Beeroth-Bene-Jaakan to Moserah according to Deuteronomy. Then he listens to the voice of God, a sound that overwhelmed so many others, and retains his composure as he hears the plans for his own death. The words are not gentle, as God recalls the rebellion at the Waters of Meribah and provides instructions that seem to take away Aaron's agency. קח אֶת־אַהֲרֹן וְאֶת־אֶלְעָזָר בְּנֵוֹ וְהָעֵל אֹתָם הָר הָהָר כּוֹהֵפֶשֶׁט אֶת־אַהֲרֹן אֶת־בְּגָדָיו" Take Aaron and Elazar his son and bring them up Hor the Mountain. Then, strip Aaron of his garments and clothe with them Elazar his son" (Numbers 20:25-6a). Despite a plan that makes him look passive and despite his advanced age, Aaron walks up the mountain of his own volition, dressed in priestly attire. The active qal form of the verb ע.ל.ה is used in Numbers 20:27, "וַיַּעֲלוּ they went up," making no distinction between the ascension of Moses and that of Aaron and Elazar. Before the eyes of all the congregation, Aaron was not brought passively to the place of his death by his brother, but rather met his fate with strength. A close reading reveals that Aaron managed to assert some level of independence, in addition to a tremendous amount of poise and dignity in the face of death.

c. David

David comes to the end of his life demonstrating a level of independence one might expect from a king. Although he is acted upon by Bathsheba and Nathan, David is authoritative and resolute in his response. Following his interaction with Nathan, David orders, "קראו־לִי לְבַת־שֶׁבַע" Call Bathsheba to me!" (I Kings 1:28). From that moment on, David takes control and the scene unfolds according to his will. As a note, having others initiate an interaction with a dying figure does not diminish their power if they take charge afterward; a "show of counter-initiative on the part of the dying character reflects the ideal of the good death. Awareness, mental clarity, and physical vigour are common features of an ideal death in many different cultures, and this is observable in the

Hebrew Bible.”¹³ The counter-initiative begins with the summons to Bathsheba and continues for many verses as David also summons priest, prophet, and commander and lays out instructions that they obediently follow. At the very start of I Kings 1, David is described as an ailing man in a sickbed, but by the end of the chapter he is issuing orders as a respected king.

d. Contemporary Implications

Jacob, Aaron, and David all meet death at an old age, but their advanced years do not strip them of independence. In each case, the independence is not total; Jacob relies upon his sons for proper burial, Aaron is stripped of his garments by his brother, and David is prodded along by his wife and prophet. Still, there is a certain amount of dignity and control accorded to these dying men as they pass on their legacies. The question becomes how to afford that same level of honor to the dying in modern times, considering that many people pass away in hospital settings that deprive patients of autonomy, or otherwise at advanced stages of decline that make independent action challenging. The Tanach stories suggest three possible answers: making arrangements early, giving weight to subtle actions, and being surrounded by responsive and respectful loved ones.

First, there is no rule that says end-of-life arrangements must be made at an advanced age or in the face of serious illness. In fact, it is much wiser to begin drawing up necessary paperwork and having these emotional discussions when one is relatively young and in good health. Jacob’s anxiety about burial is palpable, both when he addresses Joseph and when he informs all his sons of his desires even after receiving a sworn oath that they will be carried out; David is working against both the clock and a son who seems unaware that he is not the chosen successor. The drama is heightened precisely because these men did not articulate their posthumous wishes earlier, but drama is not desirable outside of a narrative setting. Wills, living wills, and healthcare proxy and power of attorney paperwork can all be arranged when a person is well, enabling their wishes to be

¹³ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 99-100.

shared and received no matter what happens later. Taking this approach is not morbid, it is responsible. It is also wise for a person to revisit their decisions and documents at a regular interval in case developments in their thinking or in medical technology cause them to want to change their arrangements.

Second, when a person cannot exercise independence in a big way, it is possible to give greater weight to subtle actions. Aaron is supposed to be taken to his death as a passive figure, but by focusing on just one word in the text, the reader sees that he is active and poised, climbing a mountain dressed in priestly garb. Similarly, allowing a severely ill person to control who enters their room, offering a hospice patient a choice of entertainment, or arranging a dying person's hair in the style they prefer are all small gestures that can grant autonomy. Preserving the independence and dignity of a dying person is a tremendous gift that can be given even in small ways.

Third, one learns from these stories that the autonomy a dying person exercises is often dependent on *kavod* granted by others. Lacking in physical prowess, those in a sickbed or deathbed need their loved ones to be responsive to their desires. Ideally, modern society would demonstrate respect for the ill and aged generally, but until that happens, individuals can implement this ideal in their own spheres. Asking a loved one about end-of-life wishes, taking time to visit them in care facilities, and communicating that their preferences carry significant weight not only benefits them but contributes to a culture of greater dignity for all.

Presence of Loved Ones

To pass on a legacy, there must be someone capable of serving as a successor. Jacob, Aaron, and David all cast one or more of their sons in that role. The presence of these and other loved ones in their final days indicates both intention, a plan to communicate final messages to selected descendants, and authority, commanding the attention and responsiveness of others.

a. Jacob

Not only does Jacob experience the final stage of his life surrounded by family, but he determines who is present at various points and steers the interactions. Initially, Jacob calls Joseph to him, and his son arrives alone in accordance with this summons. Jacob then successfully secures a sworn oath from Joseph regarding his desired burial. After some time, Joseph returns with his two sons who, although they were not explicitly called for, are embraced like invited guests by their grandfather. Jacob then becomes the dominant actor and initiates an adoption ceremony to make Manasseh and Ephraim legally equivalent to his other sons (Genesis 48:5). This action grants Joseph the privileges of primogeniture (see also Genesis 48:22), securing his position as primary successor while elevating these grandsons as well.¹⁴ This topic of succession carries over into the last scene when Jacob calls to all his sons and they gather by his deathbed. The varied assessments he makes support a type of “tiered succession” in which “all twelve sons are ‘blessed’ as worthy successors...[but] some among a group of successors are differentiated.”¹⁵ Joseph achieves the highest rank, Judah and Benjamin are also beloved, but all the sons become heads of tribes and are part of Jacob’s legacy. And, despite the harsh words doled out to some, Jacob charges everyone present with his burial wishes. Jacob dies surrounded by all his sons, with a strong enough sense of authority that he can issue both honest statements and demands. As a final note, it is important to recognize that missing from Jacob’s deathbed are Leah and Rachel, two wives who predeceased him, and his daughter Dinah. The absence of these figures indicates that even those fortunate enough to pass away surrounded by family rarely if ever die in the presence of all their loved ones.

¹⁴ Jacob is fortunate enough to have twelve sons, two of whom prove their leadership potential within his lifetime and are worthy of being distinguished successors. Joseph is considered the ‘head’ of the Northern Tribes, while Judah is considered the ‘head’ of the Southern Tribes. Despite being fourth-born, Judah earns his position as leader when he steps up in Genesis 43:8-10 to ensure Benjamin’s safety, providing an excellent model of growth, responsibility, and *teshuvah*.

¹⁵ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 178.

b. Aaron

Aaron meets his death at the instruction of God, alongside his brother Moses and son Elazar. As readers know, Moses and Aaron were siblings who worked and exercised leadership as partners for decades. Aaron served as Moses' mouthpiece and gave him the courage to approach Pharaoh; Moses shared God's word and helped to establish the Mishkan and legitimate the priestly system Aaron oversaw. Elazar trained alongside Aaron for years to ensure the people's sacrifices were acceptable to God. He was a competent professional and a present son, worthy of ascending to the role of High Priest and succeeding his father. That Aaron stands atop Mount Hor with these two dedicated and beloved family members is a sign of blessing, and it softens the understanding of his death as punishment for a prior misstep. Aaron dies in the presence of those he loves dearly, knowing his legacy is secured by both the most powerful man in his generation and a very reliable leader in the next generation. What's more, these two family members are not the only people present in Aaron's final stage. "As he ascends the mountain to die, Aaron is accompanied by his brother and son while explicitly followed visually by the entire people..." and after he dies, "in the only report of its kind in Numbers, the people mourn Aaron for a period of thirty days."¹⁶ Aaron's death is bookended by the presence of those he served throughout his lifetime. The people are united in their concern and mourning for Aaron, as evidenced by the repetition of the word כל/all. In Numbers 20:22 "בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל-הָעֵדָה" the children of Israel, **all** the congregation" arrive at Mount Hor, in verse 27 they climb before "עֵינֵי כָל-הָעֵדָה" the eyes of **all** the congregation," and in verse 29 "כָּל-הָעֵדָה **all** the congregation" sees Aaron has died and "כָּל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל" **all** the house of Israel" mourns his passing. Like Jacob, Aaron dies apart from certain loved ones, such as his predeceased sons Nadav and Avihu, his wife Elisheva, and his other living son Itamar. Still, he enjoys the unique

¹⁶ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 151.

blessing of a loving community looking on all together and responding to the end of his life with gravity and grief.

c. David

While the choreography surrounding the deaths of Jacob and Aaron is clear, explicitly stating who is present at various steps, the same cannot be said for David. When the narrative shifts to his very last interaction it says, “וַיִּקְרָבוּ יְמֵי־דָוִד לָמוּת וַיֵּצֵא אֶת־שָׁלֹמֶה בְּנוֹ” David’s time to die drew near, and he commanded Solomon his son...” (I Kings 2:1). Certainly, Solomon is present when his father breathes his last, but it is possible that others from previous scenes were there as well and remain unnoted by the (in)famously laconic text. Then again, it may be that only Solomon is nearby when David passes away. Whatever the case, in David’s last days he is surrounded by people with whom he has significant relationships, whether family or loyal attendants. There is an intimacy evident in his relationship with Abishag (I Kings 1:1-4), and the responsiveness of Zadok, Nathan, and Benaiah is striking. Such faithful individuals allow David to approach his death with authority that derives not only from his title as king but also from these relationships themselves. Bathsheba is also a prominent figure, prompting David to make arrangements for his successor and showing appreciation and reverence when he does. Once her plan is accepted, she declares “חַי אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ” חַי אֲדֹנָי הַמֶּלֶךְ May my lord king David live forever!” (I Kings 1:31). This could be a form of flattery designed to ensure that he follows through on his promise, reminding David that he is king until he takes his last breath. Still, it can be read more generously as the expression of a wife who cares for her husband and does not want to lose him. Like Jacob and Aaron, David successfully bequeaths a legacy to his chosen son, as he is blessed to see Solomon enthroned before passing away. And like the other two men, for all this blessedness there are loved ones missing in David’s final days, whether his rebellious or predeceased sons or his other wives. Still, David’s story demonstrates that

trusted attendants matter greatly, and that the care shown throughout earlier struggles is noteworthy, even for those who cannot be present at the time of death.

d. Contemporary Implications

The presence of loved ones at or near the time of death was a sign of blessing in the Tanach, and many think of it the same way today. According to Lee, “To see one’s descendants is a blessing in the Hebrew Bible and the ancient Near East (and, indeed, throughout human literature and culture). It is one of the primary factors differentiating good and bad deaths in Hebrew narrative.”¹⁷ It is one thing to be promised many descendants, and quite another to live to see children grow, grandchildren and even great-grandchildren be born; having these relatives around during illness and decline brings comfort. They also allow the dying to interact with intention, sharing final wisdom or wishes, and authority, commanding respect from family to an extent they might not achieve with health or homecare professionals. That being said, many people find that the loved ones present near death are not relatives, and they too play significant supportive roles. For some, chosen family takes the place of biological family, providing the love and respect that is needed. Others benefit from a combination of devoted attendants and caring community members, much like David and Aaron, respectively. And for all people, just like for all three of the biblical figures studied in this chapter, there is no way for every loved one to be physically present before death. A spouse may have died years earlier, a child may be unable to travel to the sickbed in time, feuds and tensions may keep some people away. Once efforts have been made to do right by the dying person, it may be best to let go and not allow the ideal be the enemy of the good. If even patriarchs, priests and monarchs could not have every loved one present, it is likely unrealistic to expect perfection today.

¹⁷ Lee, *The Death of Jacob*, 141.

Tangible and Intangible Inheritances

Having reviewed who is present to serve as successor and executor for the dying, I will now turn to what specifically those people receive as inheritances. Jacob, Aaron, and David all bequeath unto their children a combination of tangible and intangible gifts. One might expect an ethereal inheritance to be the most deeply meaningful, but the concrete objects given also carry a tremendous amount of symbolic significance.

a. Jacob

Although Jacob's deathbed scene is extensive and includes many promises to his family, only once does he grant something tangible. Before calling in all his sons, Jacob says to Joseph, "וְאָנִי נִתְּנִי לְךָ שְׂכָם אֶחָד עַל־אַחֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר לָקַחְתִּי מִיַּד הָאֱמֹרִי בְּחַרְבִּי וּבִקְשָׁתִּי And I give you one portion over your brothers, that which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow" (Genesis 48:22). While the definition of the word שְׂכָם is debated by translators, rendered variably as "intent" "portion" or "mountain slope," it appears that Jacob is referring to a tract of land. This is more than a physical gift, and not just because it helps communicate Joseph's primacy over his brothers. For Jacob, the land represents his former strength; "It is remarkable that paradoxically on his deathbed, as vitality wanes, Jacob chooses to depart from Joseph with the words *my sword and bow*. These are words of power and possession."¹⁸

In addition to this one tangible inheritance, Jacob gives his sons and grandsons numerous intangible gifts, chief among them a continued relationship with his God. Jacob makes a concerted effort with Joseph to ensure the connection to the Divine remains unbroken. When Jacob first invokes God, he uses the name El Shaddai (Genesis 48:3), but once Joseph uses the name Elohim (Genesis 48:9), Jacob switches to that same word (Genesis 48:11), legitimizing and reinforcing his

¹⁸ Chaya Greenberger, "A Patriarch Reviews the Past to Impact the Future," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (2021): 59-60.

son's connection to the Divine. He then invokes the God of himself, his father and grandfather while blessing his son and grandsons (Genesis 48:15-16). Jacob blesses most of his descendants with some combination of progeny, prestige, property, and protection, signs of Divine favor that he also enjoyed throughout his lifetime. Thus, in both material and immaterial ways, Jacob provides an inheritance that reflects core pieces of his identity and experiences.

b. Aaron

Aaron transfers tangible objects to his son, but what makes these items so meaningful is their symbolic value. Before he passes away, Aaron's vestments are stripped from his person and placed on Elazar. Clothing worn by a loved one is special in and of itself, as it may carry their scent or memories of time spent together. Still, what makes this scene so momentous is that the vestments represent the leadership role that Aaron held for so many years. In putting on these garments, Elazar is being promoted to the position of High Priest and quite literally agreeing to walk in his father's shoes.

Although the tangible items are given to Elazar alone, all of Aaron's descendants are being elevated in that moment. As Dr. Adriane Leveen observes, a key objective of the book of Numbers is to legitimize the priestly hierarchy, with the sons of Aaron on top.¹⁹ She writes that

"in Numbers there is a distinct division of labor within the priestly class. Those activities that require supervision of the people, officiating at sacrifices, involvement in communal matters, and the priestly blessing are specifically fulfilled either by a generic priest, labeled in Hebrew 'Cohen' (and not Levite), or, more often, by a priest specifically affiliated with Aaron. The more manual tasks connected to the tabernacle are assigned to the Levites who are supervised by Aaron and his sons."²⁰

While there are perks to occupying the top rank, it should be noted that Aaron is not bequeathing raw power for its own sake. Like Jacob, he is determined to secure a link between God and his descendants. Even though Aaron's death is a punishment for a moment of disconnection from the

¹⁹ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 3.

²⁰ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 52.

Divine, he has spent his life serving God, and in his final moments he affirms this relationship for himself and generations to come. Uniquely, Aaron is concerned not only with his family's tie to God, but also that of the entire nation. According to the belief system laid out in Numbers, "Only the priests can ensure God's blessing and Israel's future by obtaining the divine presence in the priestly sanctuary,"²¹ so by instilling service of God in his sons, Aaron grants safety and security to all Israel. In his final moments, Aaron gifts a legacy grounded in his loyalty to family, God, and community.

c. David

The major question surrounding David's death is who will become king in his stead. In bestowing this position upon his son, David diverges from the existing precedent in the books of Judges and Samuel and makes executive leadership an inheritance based on family line. This follows the "divine promise of an enduring dynastic house" given in II Samuel 7, a promise at risk if David does not select and teach his successor well.²² In order to transfer power, David grants physical symbols of kingship to Solomon, including his mule and throne. With the help of other concrete tools like anointing oil and a shofar, Solomon is made king, but it is not until David sees Solomon in his seat of power that he declares, "בְּרוּךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר נָתַן הַיּוֹם יֹשֵׁב עַל־כִּסְאִי וְעֵינַי רְאוּת" Blessed is YHWH, God of Israel, who has granted today that he sits upon my throne and my eyes behold it!" (Kings 1:48). Just as securing the role of king takes both tangible objects and intangible titles, passing on a special relationship with God requires a similar combination. David advises Solomon that he must follow and guard the ways of YHWH, "כַּכְתּוּב בְּתוֹרַת מֹשֶׁה" as it is written in the Torah of Moses" (I Kings 2:3), but he must also strive to reach a more abstract goal, "וַחֲזַקְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ" be strong and be as a man" (I Kings 2:2). Divine favor does follow Solomon, concretely seen in his united kingdom and ability to build the Temple, and more ethereally in the form of wisdom seen

²¹ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 165.

²² Keith Bodner, "The Rule of Death and Signs of Life in the Book of Kings," in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 2.

as a gift from above. Solomon is able to follow the example and advice of his father, and both enjoy long reigns and special relationships to God.

d. Contemporary Implications

Two important lessons can be drawn from the tangible and intangible inheritances bequeathed by Jacob, Aaron, and David onto their children that apply to contemporary readers. First, physical inheritances gain special meaning when they symbolize something essential about the deceased. The tract of land given to Joseph is about Jacob's former strength; the vestments given to Elazar represent Aaron's years of service; the throne and Torah entrusted to Solomon made David a respected ruler. Today when someone is left a house, favorite suit, or piece of jewelry, there is no denying that the financial value of the object matters, but its sentimental value derives from the way it reflects the deceased. The fact that even those as powerful and wealthy as patriarchs, priests, and kings focus on giving objects of deep personal significance shows how much this type of inheritance means.

Second, it is notable that each figure studied focuses in his last moments on forging a connection between his family and God. In confronting their own mortality and finiteness, these men seek to attach their children and themselves to that which is immortal and infinite. In the Torah, God serves as a guarantor of security for the next generation, a link to the past and future, and an arbiter of good morals. For many today, God plays a similar role and provides peace of mind that allows a person to trust that their loved ones will be okay after they are gone. For others, teaching core values, sharing intergenerational stories and traits, or a belief in some other higher power provides this comfort. Whatever one believes, at the moment of greatest vulnerability, it is important to attach oneself and others to an enduring source of support.

Rectification and Revenge

As Jacob, Aaron, and David approach death, significant events from earlier in their lives arise. Sometimes these are past mistakes they seek to rectify, important relationships they damaged by behaving poorly. In other cases, past grievances are recalled and there is a desire for punishment and revenge. This combination of grace and grudges demonstrates the complicated role memory plays at the end of life.

a. Jacob

During his deathbed interactions, it becomes clear that Jacob's biggest regret is the burial he performed for Rachel.²³ She died in labor on the road to Ephrath and was buried there (Genesis 35:19), rather than in the Cave of Mahpelah alongside the other matriarchs and patriarchs. Rachel held the position of Jacob's most beloved wife, yet her eternal resting place belies that fact. By adopting Manasseh and Ephraim, Jacob tries to bring additional honor to his *besheret*. Chaya Greenberger summarizes Jacob's actions saying,

"Jacob wanted to bring about a '*tikun*' for his beloved Rachel. The two children of Joseph, her firstborn, would take the place of additional children she never had. The decision to catapult Ephraim and Manasseh into the status of children is thus understandably sandwiched in between the recollection and (re)interpretation of the prophecy [Genesis 48:3-4], and the circumstances of Rachel's death [Genesis 48:7]."²⁴

Jacob cannot reinter Rachel, but by granting her additional children he shows an awareness of how much maternity mattered to her, and by giving her firstborn a double portion, he helps to rectify the unfairness of her being superseded in both marriage and childbirth by Leah.

Jacob does not only seek meaningful repair in his final days, but he also shares deep anger and judgment toward several of his children. All twelve become the heads of tribes, so Jacob's reproach does not rob them of all success. Still, for four of the sons, their father's final words are harsh, raising up their worst flaws and making that part of their identity and legacy. Jacob berates Reuben for laying with Bilhah, which was known to Jacob earlier but may have been a shocking

²³ Rachel's death will also be covered in even greater detail in chapter 3 of this thesis.

²⁴ Greenberger, "A Patriarch Reviews," 57.

revelation for the other sons (Genesis 35:22); either way, Jacob is raising his eldest son's worst betrayal. He then turns to Simeon and Levi and characterizes them as violent men, alluding to the bloody and duplicitous way they destroyed Shechem in Genesis 34. He then curses them saying, "אָפּם כִּי גַז וְעִבְרָתָם כִּי קִשְׁתָּה אֶחְלָקֶם בְּיַעֲלֹב וְאֶפְיָצִם בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל" Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so severe! I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel!" (Genesis 49:7). Lastly, Jacob expresses judgment of Issachar who, "וַיֵּרָא מִנְּחֹלָה כִּי טוֹב וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נַעֲמָה וַיֵּט שֹׁכְמוֹ" וַיֵּרָא מִנְּחֹלָה כִּי טוֹב וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ כִּי נַעֲמָה וַיֵּט שֹׁכְמוֹ when he saw that the resting place was good and the land was pleasant, he bent his shoulder to bear a load, and he became a laboring serf" (Genesis 49:15). This insult is not based on a personal grievance like the others, but Jacob is communicating that his ninth child is not a thoughtful or capable leader. Thus, as Jacob holds the rapt attention of his sons, he shares grudges and negative assessments with an indelicate directness that may only be accepted from the dying.

b. Aaron

Aaron's death differs from the other figures studied in this chapter because his voice is missing from the text. As a result, the focus is not on Aaron's regrets or resentments, but rather on the ways he is punished and forgiven by God. God begins the instructions regarding Aaron's death by saying, "יֹאסֹף אֶהְרֹן אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ כִּי לֹא יבֹא אֶל־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל אֲשֶׁר־מְרִיתֶם אֶת־פִּי לְמִי" Let Aaron be gathered to his people, for he shall not come into the land that I have given to the children of Israel, because you both rebelled against My word at the Waters of Meribah" (Numbers 20:24). Thus, although the scene at the top of the mountain is quite moving and Aaron's death is uniquely peaceful in the book of Numbers, it is still "explicitly depicted as the result of divine punishment."²⁵ The leaders must be penalized for their rebellion, which occurred just a few verses earlier. At the same time, it is quite surprising that God does not mention the golden calf, Aaron's gravest lapse in judgment and leadership. Jacob recalled the worst actions of three of his

²⁵ Leveen, *Memory and Tradition*, 149.

sons immediately before death, but God does no such thing to Aaron.²⁶ While it would be presumptuous to say that God had fully forgiven Aaron for this mistake, it may be that years of dedicated leadership in the wilderness did enact some type of *tikkun* for this error.

c. David

David is explicit about the allies and enemies he holds at the end of life, and in fact uses his final words to talk about these relationships. Rather than ending his speech by instructing Solomon to follow in the ways of God, David continues with wartime recollections. He recalls the barbarity of Yoav son of Zeruiah (I Kings 2:5) and the curse of Shimei son of Gera the Benjaminite (I Kings 2:8), telling Solomon to deny them peace and send them to Sheol. David also advises that the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite should continued to be honored and protected due to their father's loyalty (I Kings 2:7). Thus, grace and grudges inform David's final thoughts and words. In addition to these explicit invocations of the past, the need to rectify David's most serious errors may also inform his deathbed actions. As David Marcus explains,

"David was prepared to abandon Bathsheba even before she announced her pregnancy; he was prepared to abandon her during her pregnancy (since he wanted to hide his paternity of the child). He certainly was prepared to abandon her had Uriah gone home. Killing Uriah may not have been in the original plan proposed to her by David. It is even possible that David did once promise Bathsheba regarding Solomon [becoming king], but did not follow it up...Added to the indignities which David had perpetrated on her (he had violated her wedlock, subjected her to a charge of adultery, forced her to suffer loss of husband and first child, and he had not mourned the death of that child)...[there are many reasons for her to feel aggrieved]."²⁷

While there is no description of David loving Batsheba the way Jacob did Rachel, here again there is a man making up for an offense against his spouse. In naming Solomon king, David goes to his death having selected a capable successor and having saved the life and dignity of a wife he previously wronged.

²⁶ It should be noted that Aaron still experiences significant hardship in his lifetime, specifically the loss of Nadav and Avihu. Their actions may have caused this extreme reaction from God, but there is no doubt that their deaths were a trauma for Aaron, and he did not live a blissful life free from harsh Divine punishment.

²⁷ David Marcus, "David the Deceiver," 167.

d. Contemporary Implications

As seen in the stories of Jacob, Aaron, and David, death does not erase or smooth over all past missteps. Nowadays, ideally when a loved one approaches the end, they can let go of both regrets and anger. Still, for some people to feel at peace, they may need to review significant events in their lives and express sentiments that cause others discomfort. This could mean admitting to an affair, apologizing for abuse, judging the choices of a child or friend, or communicating that they felt hurt or abandoned by someone. Whether a dying person does any of these particular things, it is important to recognize that it is unrealistic to expect them to only pass on feel-good messages. Dying is a human experience, so those who are dying are human, with the same limitations and weaknesses we all possess. Still, as shown in the biblical text, memory can also be a source of forgiveness and uplift. Final words and actions can help to smooth over divisions created in years past. If a direct apology cannot be made, it may be possible to act like Jacob did for Rachel and do something special for the next generation. Like God to Aaron, it is also possible to simply omit reference to previous errors and let bygones be bygones in response to genuine growth and change. Intergenerational bonds can also be built, as David urges Solomon to do with the sons of Barzillai, to continue the friendship between two groups and create lasting ties. A good death does not mean the absence of all bad memories, but it ideally also includes some repair and reconciliation.

Conclusion

Jacob, Aaron, and David are all fortunate to approach death and craft their legacies with both intention and authority. These two characteristics play out in multiple ways during their final days, but some commonalities can be observed. All three demonstrate independence, whether of mind, body, or will, and maintain the respect of others even as they become increasingly vulnerable. They have the foresight and power to gather together their loved ones and die in the presence of

family. These men also bequeath both physical and intangible inheritances, gifting items, blessings, and advice that represent core pieces of their identities. All reflect on significant moments in their lives and deal with the complications of memory, which can carry regrets and grievances; sometimes there is a desire for revenge, but at other points meaningful repairs allow a greater sense of peace.

The beauty of all these similarities is that they can inform how modern readers think of and plan for a better death. It is not only patriarchs, priests, and kings that get to pass away while exercising a level of forethought and control, it is something that can be experienced by many people today. Not everyone will maintain the same abilities of cognition and communication as they age, but legacies and final wishes can be considered and written down far before the day of death. There is no such thing as a perfect death, and each of the stories studied in this thesis chapter contains one or more difficulties, but striving to give the greatest *kavod* to a dying person and their legacy can grant peace of mind at the end of life. A better and more thoughtful approach was possible for our forebearers, and it is available to us as well.

Translation: Jacob's Death
Genesis 47:28-49:33

Genesis 47:28

וַיְחִי	יַעֲקֹב	בְּאֶרֶץ	מִצְרַיִם	שִׁבְעַת	עֶשְׂרֵה
He lived	Jacob	in the land	Egypt	seven	ten
שָׁנָה	וַיְהִי	יְמֵי-יַעֲקֹב	שָׁנִי	חַיָּיו	
year	it was	days of Jacob	years	his life	
שִׁבְעַת	שָׁנִים	וָאַרְבָּעִים	וּמֵאֶת	שָׁנָה	
seven	years	and forty	and one hundred	year	

Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; and the days of Jacob, the years of his life, were one hundred and forty-seven years.²⁸

Genesis 47:29

וַיִּקְרְבוּ	יְמֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל	לָמוּת	וַיִּקְרָא	לְבָנֹו	לְיוֹסֵף
They drew near	days of Israel	to die	he called	to his son	Joseph
וַיֹּאמֶר	לֹו	אִם-נָא	מָצָאתִי	חֵן	בְּעֵינֶיךָ
he said	to him	if, please	I have found	grace	in your eyes
שִׁים-נָא	יָדְךָ	תַּחַת	יָרְגִי	וַעֲשִׂית	עִמָּדִי
place please	your hand	under	my thigh	you make	with me
חֶסֶד	וְאֵמֶת	אֶל-נָא	תִּקְבְּרֵנִי	בְּמִצְרַיִם	
kindness	and truth	do not please	bury me	in Egypt	

The days of Israel drew near to die, so he called to his son Joseph and said to him, “If, pray, I have found favor in your eyes, place your hand, pray, under my thigh and act toward me with true kindness—pray, do not bury me in Egypt.”²⁹

Genesis 47:30

וְשָׁכַבְתִּי	עִם-אֲבֹתַי	וְנִשְׂאֲתֵנִי	מִמִּצְרַיִם	וְקִבַּרְתֵּנִי	
I will lie down	with my fathers	bear me up	from Egypt	and bury me	
בְּקִבְרֵתָם	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲנִי	אֲעֲשֶׂה	כְּדִבְרְךָ	
in their grave	he said	I	will do	as you spoke	

“When I lie with my fathers,³⁰ bear me up from Egypt and bury me in their burial site.” He said, “I will do as you have spoken.”

²⁸ The text simply relays the number of years Jacob lived in Egypt and then the span of his life. The lack of further detail indicates that these last years were relatively peaceful ones. After Jacob was presented to Pharaoh, Joseph led the country through famine, and their people settled in Goshen, things remained stable and nothing else was noted.

²⁹ The repetition of נָא three times, in addition to the phrase “if I have found favor in your eyes” all point to an uncomfortable power differential. Jacob may be the father, but the combination of old age, asking for a favor, and Joseph’s high status in Egypt leads to an unexpected level of deference.

³⁰ This phrase, lying with one’s fathers, reads naturally in both Hebrew and English. Still, I cannot help but notice that Jacob does not mention his wife Leah who is buried at the same site. This may be because he is

Genesis 47:31

וַיֹּאמֶר	הַשְׁבַּעָה	לִי	וַיִּשְׁבַּע	לּוֹ
He said	swear	to me	he swore	to him
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	עַל־רֹאשׁ	הַמֶּטֶה	
he bowed down	Israel	upon head	the bed	

Then he said, “Swear to me!” And he swore to him. Then Israel bowed at the head of the bed.³¹

Genesis 48:1

וַיְהִי	אַחֲרָי	הַדְּבָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	וַיֹּאמֶר
And it was	after	the things	these	(he) said
לְיוֹסֵף	הִנֵּה	אֲבִיר	חֹלָה	וַיִּקַּח
to Joseph	behold/look	your father	sick	he took
אֶת־שְׁנֵי	בָנָיו	עִמּוֹ	אֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה	וְאֶת־אֶפְרַיִם
(to) two	his sons	with him	(to) Manasseh	and (to) Ephraim

Then it happened after these things, someone said to Joseph, “Look, your father is ill.” So, he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim.³²

Genesis 48:2

וַיֹּגֵד	לְיַעֲקֹב	וַיֹּאמֶר	הִנֵּה	בְנִי	יוֹסֵף
(He) told	to Jacob	(he) said	behold/look	your son	Joseph
בָּא	אֵלַיךְ	וַיִּתְחַזֵּק	יִשְׂרָאֵל ³³	וַיֵּשֶׁב	עַל־הַמֶּטֶה
comes	to you	he strengthened himself	Israel	he sat	upon the bed

Someone told Jacob and said, “Look, your son Joseph is coming to you.” So, Israel strengthened himself and sat up in bed.³⁴

Genesis 48:3

וַיֹּאמֶר	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־יוֹסֵף	אֵל	שַׁדַּי	נִרְאָה־אֵלַי
He said	Jacob	to Joseph	El	Shaddai	appeared to me
בְּלוֹז	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	וַיְבָרֵךְ	אֶתִּי	

asking for a promise from Rachel’s eldest son, because his regret over Rachel’s burial overshadows the proper burial of Leah, or because he was never as attached to Leah in life.

³¹ This bowing may be a further indication of the power imbalance between father and son, or it may indicate a bodily release as the anxiety Jacob had regarding his burial is alleviated by Joseph’s oath.

³² This is the only verse in the deathbed scenes in which Manasseh is listed before Ephraim, in accordance with their birth order.

³³ While this is not the first time the name Israel is used in this deathbed scene, the name change within this verse is notable. In the first cola, Jacob is passive, in bed and informed of his son’s arrival; in the second cola, he goes by Israel and finds strength within.

³⁴ By sitting up in bed, Jacob demonstrates strength despite his illness, and authority despite the fact that Joseph arrives without a formal summons. Jacob indicates an openness to the meeting, which continues as he communicates gratitude and blessings in the verses that follow.

me	and blessed	Canaan	in the land	at Luz
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And Jacob said to Joseph, “El Shaddai³⁵ appeared to me at Luz, in the land of Canaan, and blessed me,

Genesis 48:4

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלַי	הִנְנִי	מְפַרֵּךְ	וְהִרְבִּיתֶךָ
He said	to me	behold/look	I will make you fruitful	and make you great
וְנָתַתִּיךָ	לְקָהָל	עַמִּים	וְנָתַתִּי	אֶת־הָאָרֶץ
and give you	assembly/congregation	peoples	I will give	(to) the land
הַזֹּאת	לְזֶרְעֶךָ	אַחֲרָיִךְ	אֶחָזָת	עוֹלָם
this	to your seed	after you	possession	forever

“and said to me, ‘Look, I will make you fruitful and multiply you and grant you an assembly of peoples; and I will give this land to your seed after you as an everlasting possession.’³⁶

Genesis 48:5

וְעַתָּה	שְׁנֵי־בָנֶיךָ	הַנּוֹלְדִים	לָךְ	בְּאֶרֶץ
And now	your two sons	those born	to you	in the land
מִצְרַיִם	עַד־בָּאִי	אֵלַיִךְ	מִצְרַיִמָּה	לִי־הֵם
Egypt	until I came	to you	toward Egypt	to me they are
אֶפְרַיִם	וּמְנַשֶּׁה	כְּרֹאוּבֵן	וְשִׁמְעוֹן	יִהְיוּ־לִי
Ephraim	and Manasseh	as Reuben	and Simeon	they shall be to me

“And now, your two sons, those born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, they shall be mine; Ephraim and Manasseh, like Reuben and Simeon, shall be mine.

Genesis 48:6

וּמוֹלִדְתֶךָ	אֲשֶׁר־הוֹלַדְתָּ	אַחֲרֵיהֶם	לָךְ	יִהְיוּ
And your offspring	which you beget	after them	to you	they shall be
עַל	שֵׁם	אֲחֵיהֶם	יִקְרְאוּ	בְּנַחֲלָתָם
upon	name	their brothers	they will be called	in their inheritance

“But offspring that you beget after them, they shall be yours; by their brothers’ name they shall be called in their inheritance.

Genesis 48:7

וְאֲנִי	בְּבֹאִי	מִפַּדָּן	מָתָהּ	עָלַי
And I	in my coming	from Paddan	she died	upon me/because of me
רָחֵל	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	בְּדֶרֶךְ	בְּעוֹד

³⁵ This is the name of God used in Genesis 35:11, when God spoke of God’s Self to Jacob in the prophesy he is about to paraphrase.

³⁶ This promise from God is paraphrased from Genesis 35:11-12, though not repeated verbatim; still, the salient points are preserved in this retelling.

more	on the way	Canaan	in the land	Rachel
שם	ואקברה	אפרתה	לבא	כברת-ארץ
there	and I buried her	toward Ephrath	to come/to go	distance land
לחם	בית	הוא	אפרת	בנרר
Lehem/bread	Beit/house	she	Ephrath	on the way

“For I, in my coming from Paddan, Rachel died on me,³⁷ in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was still more distance to go toward Ephrath, and I buried her there on the way.” Ephrath, this is Beit-Lehem.

Genesis 48:8

מי-אלה	ויאמר	יוסף	את-בני	ישראל	וירא
who are these	he said	Joseph	(to) sons	Israel	He saw

Israel saw the sons of Joseph, and he said, “Who are these?”

Genesis 48:9

אשר-נתן-לי	הם	בני	אל-אביו	יוסף	ויאמר
which given me	they	my sons	to his father	Joseph	He said

ואברכם	אלי	קחם-נא	ויאמר	בזה	אלהים
and I will bless them	to me	take them please	he said	here	Elohim

Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons whom Elohim has given me here.”³⁸ He said, “Take them, please, to me, and I will bless them.”

Genesis 48:10

לראות	יוכל	לא	מזקן	כבדו	ישראל	ועיני
to see	he could	no	from age	heavy	Israel	And eyes of

להם	ויחבק	להם	וישק	אליו	אתם	ויגש
to them	he hugged	to them	he kissed	to him	them	he drew near

Now, Israel’ eyes were heavy from age, he could not see; so he drew them near to him,³⁹ and he kissed them and hugged them.

³⁷ It is notable how much Jacob focuses on himself in these few words. He begins a sentence about Rachel’s death with וָאֲנִי in addition to a verb conjugated in the first-person singular, and then says not simply that Rachel died, but died עָלַי on me. Read sympathetically, Jacob is grappling with immense guilt not just for Rachel’s death but also her improper burial. Read less generously, this focus on self is a pattern for Jacob that caused tensions in family relationships throughout his life.

³⁸ Note that Joseph does not share the names of his sons in this answer, indicating Jacob’s question may have been a formal legalistic one rather than a request for actual information. In fact, Joseph never says their names to his father, but Jacob blesses them by name in verse 20.

³⁹ This verb root ה.ש.ג. is repeated in verse 12, and it is also present in Genesis 27 when Jacob steals Isaac’s blessing from his Esau. In both scenarios, the younger usurps the elder, and the patriarch giving the blessing suffers from failing eyesight. In this situation, though, Jacob is not tricked into placing Ephraim before Manasseh, and in fact insists on doing so. As much as Jacob has grown throughout the course of his life, he cannot help but repeat this family pattern, both in blessing his grandsons and in effectively granting Joseph primogeniture with this double portion.

Genesis 48:11

וַיֹּאמֶר	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶל־יֹסֵף	רָא	פְּנֶיךָ	לֹא	פָּלַלְתִּי
He said	Israel	to Joseph	see	your face	no	I prayed
וְהִנֵּה	הִרְאָה	אֵתִי	אֱלֹהִים	גַּם	אֶת־זֶרְעֶךָ	
and behold/look	caused to see	to me	Elohim	also	to your seed	

Israel said to Joseph, “To see your face, I had not prayed; yet look, Elohim has allowed me to see also your seed!”⁴⁰

Genesis 48:12

וַיּוֹצֵא	יֹסֵף	אֹתָם	מֵעַם	בְּרָכָיו	וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	לְאִפָּיו	אֶרְצָה
Brought out	Joseph	them	from	his knees	he bowed down	to his nose	toward the land

Joseph brought them forth from his knees, and he bowed down with his nose to the ground.⁴¹

Genesis 48:13

וַיִּקַּח	יֹסֵף	אֶת־שְׁנֵיהֶם	אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם	בְּיָמִינוֹ	מִשְׁמָל	יִשְׂרָאֵל
He took	Joseph	(to) the two of them	(to) Ephraim	in his right (hand)	from left	Israel
וְאֶת־מְנַשֶּׁה	בְּשִׁמְאֻלּוֹ	מִיְמִין	יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַיִּגַּשׁ	אֵלָיו	
and (to) Manasseh	in his left (hand)	from right	Israel	and he drew near	to him	

Then, Joseph took the two of them, Ephraim with his right hand—to the left of Israel—and Manasseh with his left hand—to the right of Israel—and he drew them near to him.

Genesis 48:14

וַיִּשְׁלַח	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶת־יְמִינוֹ	וַיִּשֶׁת	עַל־רֹאשׁ	אֶפְרַיִם
He sent	Israel	his right (hand)	and he put	upon head	Ephraim
וְהוּא	הַצְעִיר	וְאֶת־שִׁמְאֻלּוֹ	עַל־רֹאשׁ	מְנַשֶּׁה	
and he	the young	and his left (hand)	upon head	Manasseh	
שָׁכַל	אֶת־יָדָיו	כִּי	מְנַשֶּׁה	הַבְּכוֹר	
he lay crosswise	his hands	for	Manasseh	the firstborn	

Israel stretched out his right hand and placed it upon the head of Ephraim, though he was the younger, and his left hand upon the head of Manasseh; he crossed his hands though Manasseh was the firstborn.

Genesis 48:15

⁴⁰ For all of Jacob’s faults and shortcomings, he is genuinely moved by the presence of his once-lost son and his grandsons. Finding blessing and gratitude on the threshold of death is a powerful model for modern readers.

⁴¹ Earlier Jacob bowed and now Joseph is doing the same. If there existed a power imbalance from father bowing to son, it appears to be leveled out in this verse. Jacob may even be given the upper hand considering Joseph’s bow is a full prostration and Jacob’s was small enough to occur in bed.

וַיְבָרֶךְ	אֶת־יוֹסֵף	וַיֹּאמֶר	הָאֱלֹהִים	אֲשֶׁר	הִתְהַלְכוּ
He blessed	(to) Joseph	he said	the Elohim	which	they walked
אֲבֹתִי	לִפְנֵי	אַבְרָהָם	וַיְצַחֵק	הָאֱלֹהִים	
my fathers	before him	Abraham	and Isaac	the Elohim	
הִרְעָה	אֵתִי	מֵעוֹדִי	עַד־הַיּוֹם	הַזֶּה	
shepherded	to me	from still	until the day	this	

And he blessed Joseph⁴² and said, “The God before whom my fathers walked, Abraham and Isaac, the God who has shepherded me continually to this day,

Genesis 48:16

הַמְלָאֲךָ	הַגָּאֵל	אֵתִי	מִכָּל־רָע	יְבָרֵךְ	אֶת־הַנְּעָרִים
The messenger	redeemed	me	from all evil	He will bless	(to) the lads
וַיִּקְרָא	בָּהֶם	שְׁמִי	וְשֵׁם	אֲבֹתִי	אַבְרָהָם
be called	in them	my name	and the name	my fathers	Abraham
וַיְצַחֵק	וַיִּדְגּוּ	לְרַב	בְּקֶרֶב	הָאָרֶץ	
and Isaac	they will multiply	to a multitude	in the midst	the land	

“The Messenger, redeeming me from all evil, bless these lads, that they may be called by my name, and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac; may they teem to multitudes in the midst of the land.”

Genesis 48:17

וַיֵּרָא	יוֹסֵף	כִּי־יָשִׁית	אָבִיו	יְדִי־יְמִינֹו	עַל־רֹאשׁ
He saw	Joseph	that he put	his father	his right hand	upon head
אֶפְרַיִם	וַיֵּרָע	בְּעֵינָיו	וַיִּתְמָךְ	יְד־אָבִיו	לְהִסִּיר
Ephraim	it was evil	in his eyes	he grasped	his father’s hand	to turn aside
אֹתָהּ	מֵעַל	רֹאשׁ־אֶפְרַיִם	עַל־רֹאשׁ	מְנוּשָׁה	
it	from upon	head Ephraim	upon head	Manasseh	

Then, Joseph saw that his father placed his right hand upon Ephraim’s head, and it was injurious in his eyes; so, he grasped his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.⁴³

Genesis 48:18

וַיֹּאמֶר	יוֹסֵף	אֶל־אָבִיו	לֹא־כֵן	אָבִי	
He said	Joseph	to his father	no yes	my father	
כִּי־זֶה	הַבְּכֹר	שִׁים	יְמִינֶךָ	עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ	

⁴² The text is clear that by blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob is (also) blessing Joseph. While it is true that Joseph does not become the leader of a named tribe, his two sons become those leaders. Joseph is thus granted a double portion and he receives the peace of mind of knowing his offspring will be blessed and successful.

⁴³ Although Joseph fully bowed before Jacob, he still moves through the world experiencing a certain amount of power and prestige. It is quite bold to physically manipulate one’s father, let alone in the middle of a legal ceremony. Joseph assumes that Jacob is confused and that he has the power to make a correction.

upon his head	your right (hand)	place	the firstborn	for this
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And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; place your right hand upon his head.”

Genesis 48:19

וַיִּמָּאן	אָבִיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	יָדַעְתִּי	בְּנִי	יָדַעְתִּי
He refused	his father	he said	I knew	my son	I knew
גַּם־הוּא	יִהְיֶה־לָּעַם	וְגַם־הוּא	יִגְדֹל	וְאֻלַּם	אָחִיו
also he	will be a nation	and also he	will grow	but/however	his brother
הַקָּטָן	יִגְדֹל	מִמֶּנּוּ	וְזָרְעוֹ	יִהְיֶה	מְלֵא־הַגִּנּוּם
the young	he will grow	from him	and his seed	it will be	fullness the nations

But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know.⁴⁴ He too shall become a nation, and he too shall be great; but his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall be a fullness of nations.”

Genesis 48:20

וַיְבָרֶכֶם	בְּיוֹם	הַהוּא	לֵאמֹר	בְּךָ	יְבָרֵךְ
He blessed them	on the day	that	saying	in you	he will bless
יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר	יִשְׁמַךְ	אֱלֹהִים	כְּאֶפְרַיִם	
Israel	saying	set you	Elohim	as Ephraim	
וְכַמְנַשֶּׁה	וַיִּשֶׂם	אֶת־אֶפְרַיִם	לִפְנֵי	מְנַשֶּׁה	
and as Manasseh	he put	(to) Ephraim	before	Manasseh	

So, he blessed them on that day, saying, “By you shall Israel bless, saying, ‘May Elohim set you as Ephraim and Manasseh,’” and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.⁴⁵

Genesis 48:21

וַיֹּאמֶר	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶל־יֹסֵף	הִנֵּה	אֲנִי	מֵת	וְהִיא
He said	Israel	to Joseph	behold/look	I	die	and he is
אֱלֹהִים	עִמָּכֶם	וְהָשִׁיב	אֲתֶכֶם	אֶל־אֶרֶץ	אֲבֹתֵיכֶם	
Elohim	with you all	he will return	you all	to land	your fathers	

Then, Israel said to Joseph, “Look, I am about to die; but Elohim will be with you all and will bring you back to the land of your fathers.”⁴⁶

Genesis 48:22

⁴⁴ The repetition of “I know” helps Jacob to reassert his power in the scene and emphasizes that cognitive ability does not necessarily decline with age or impaired sight.

⁴⁵ With the exception of verse 1, Ephraim has come before Manasseh in every other instance, but this blessing appears to seal that flipped order officially.

⁴⁶ It is interesting that Jacob says “your fathers” rather than “my fathers” or “our fathers.” It is as if, noting his impending death, Jacob either counts himself out or has already moved himself into the pantheon of patriarchs.

וְאֵנִי	נָתַתִּי	לָךְ	שֵׁכֶם	אֶחָד	עַל־אֶחָיוֹ
And I	I give	to you	shoulder	one	upon your brothers
אֲשֶׁר	לָקַחְתִּי	מִיָּד	הָאֲמֹרִי	בְּחֶרֶבִי	וּבִקְשָׁתִי
which	I took	from hand	the Amorites	with my sword	and with my bow

“And I give to you one portion over your brothers,⁴⁷ that which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.”

Genesis 49:1

וַיִּקְרָא	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־בָּנָיו	נִיאָמַר	הַאֲסֹפוּ	וְאֶגִּידָה
He called	Jacob	to his sons	he said	gather	and I will tell you
לָכֶם	אֶת	אֲשֶׁר־יִקְרָא	אֲתֶכֶם	בְּאַחֲרֵית	הַיָּמִים
to you all	(to)	which will befall	to you all	after	the days

Then, Jacob called to his sons and said, “Gather around and I will tell you all that will befall you in the days to come.

Genesis 49:2

הַקְבִּצוּ	וּשְׁמְעוּ	בְנֵי	יַעֲקֹב	וּשְׁמְעוּ	אֶל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲבִיכֶם
Assemble	and listen	sons of	Jacob	listen	to Israel	your father

“Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father,”⁴⁸

Genesis 49:3

רְאוּבֵן	בְּכֹרִי	אַתָּה	כָּחִי	וְרֵאשִׁית
Reuben	my firstborn	you	my strength	and first
אוֹנִי	יָתֵר	שֶׁאֵת	וְיָתֵר	עָז
my vigor	Excess/abundant	lift up	and excess/abundant	strong

Reuben, you are my firstborn,⁴⁹ my might and the first of my vigor;⁵⁰ exceeding in endurance and exceeding in strength.

Genesis 49:4

פָּחוֹז	כַּמַּיִם	אֶל־תּוֹתֵר	כִּי	עָלִית	מִשְׁכְּבִי
Unbridled	as water	not remain	for	you mounted	the couch/bed
אֲכִיר	אֶז	חֲלָלָת	יְצוּעִי	עָלָה	

⁴⁷ It is unclear to me whether this additional portion is simply a summary of the double inheritance Jacob has already granted Joseph by blessing his two sons, or if there is more being given.

⁴⁸ The text often shifts between the names Jacob and Israel, but it is interesting that here the character refers to himself by both names. Mostly this reads as a poetic decision, a powerful way to open the verses that will follow and mark the shift in writing and tone. However, it could also mark that he is bringing both of his identities to this moment, approaching death while remembering both that which unfolded before he was renamed and after.

⁴⁹ Notable that Jacob does refer to Reuben as בְּכֹרִי before punishing him by taking away the privileges of the *b'chor*.

⁵⁰ This is the same word Rachel attempted to use in naming Benjamin, originally Ben-Oni.

he mounted	my couch/bed	profaned	so	your father
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Unbridled as water, you shall no longer excel, for you mounted the place your father lay; thus, you profaned my couch, he mounted!⁵¹

Genesis 49:5

שְׁמֵעוֹן	וְלֵוִי	אֶחָיו	כְּלֵי	חֲמָס	מִכְרֵיהֶם
Simeon	and Levi	brothers	vessels of	violence	their trade

Simeon and Levi, brothers, tools of violence are their trade.

Genesis 49:6

בְּסִדֵּם	אֶל־תָּבֹא	נַפְשִׁי	בְּקִהְלָם	אֶל־תִּתְּד	כְּבִדִּי
In their council	not come	my soul	in their assembly	not join	my presence
כִּי	בְּאַפָּם	הָרְגוּ	אִישׁ	וּבְרִצְנָם	עָקְרוּ־שׁוֹר
for	in their anger	they kill	man	and in their pleasure	they hamstring ox

Let not my person come into their council, let not my presence join in their assembly; for in their anger they slayed men and in their pleasure they uprooted ramparts.⁵²

Genesis 49:7

אָרוּר	אָפֶם	כִּי	עָז	וְעִבְרָתָם	כִּי
Cursed	their anger	for	strong/fierce	their wrath	for
קָשָׁתָהּ	אֲחֻלָּקֵם	בִּיעֲלָב	וְאִפְּצֵם	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	
severe	I will divide them	in Jacob	and I will scatter them	in Israel	

Cursed be their anger so fierce, and their wrath so severe! I will divide them in Jacob, and I will scatter them in Israel!

Genesis 49:8

יְהוּדָה	אתָּה	יְדוּר	אֶחָיו	יָדְךָ	בְּעֶרְךָ
Judah	you	will praise	your brothers	your hand	on back of the neck
אֹיְבֶיךָ	יִשְׁתַּחֲווּ	לָךְ	בְּנֵי	אָבִיךָ	
your enemies	they will bow down	to you	sons	your father	

Judah, you shall your brothers praise, your hand on the nape of your enemies; the sons of your father shall bow down to you.

⁵¹ Although ending this sentence with “he mounted!” is a bit clunky in the English, it reflects the fact that the Hebrew ends with an accusation of Reuben’s misconduct. He shifts from addressing Reuben directly to the third person, as if trying to gather the support and sympathy of his other sons against his eldest. This word of grievance is the last thing that Jacob says directly about Reuben.

⁵² “With many critics, the translation here reads *shur*, a poetic term for ‘wall,’ instead of *shor*, ‘ox,’ as the Masoretic Text has it. The verb, if it refers to oxen, would mean ‘to maim’ or ‘to hamstring.’ It was sometimes the ancient practice to hamstring the captured warhorses of an enemy, but it would have been foolish to hamstring captured oxen, which could not be put to peaceful use. Moreover, since Jacob is speaking of the massacre at Shechem, the narrative there explicitly noted that the cattle and other livestock were carried off, not maimed” (Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, 193).

Genesis 49:9

עלית	בני	מטרף	יהודה	אריה	גור
you arose/mount	my son	from prey	Judah	lion	Cub/whelp
יקימו	מי	וכלבא	כאריה	רבץ	כרע
will arouse him	who	and like a lion/lioness	like a lion	he stretch out	he bends

A lion's whelp is Judah, from prey, my son, you mounted;⁵³ he bends, stretches out like a lion, and like a lioness,⁵⁴ who dare arouse him?

Genesis 49:10

רגליו	מבין	ומחקק	מיהודה	שבט	לא יסור
his legs	from between	and govern	from Judah	scepter	No shall depart
עמים	יקרת	ולו	שילה	כי יבא	עד
peoples	obedience	and to him	Shiloh	for it comes	until

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs,⁵⁵ that tribute⁵⁶ shall come to him, and to him the obedience of peoples.

Genesis 49:11

אתנו	בני	ולשרקה	עילה	לגפן	אסרי
she-ass	my son	choice vine	he-ass	to the vine	Ties
סותה	ובדם ענבים	לבשו	בין	כבס	
his garment	and in blood grapes	his clothing	in the wine	he washes	

He ties to the vine his he-ass, and to the choice vine the son of his she-ass; he washes his clothing in wine, his garment in the blood of grapes.

Genesis 49:12

מחלב	ולבן שנים	מין	עינים	חכלילי
from milk	and white teeth	from wine	eyes	They are dark

Darker than wine are his eyes, and whiter than milk are his teeth.

Genesis 49:13

⁵³ "Mount" here echoes what was said to Reuben and shows that there is a right way and a wrong way to mount. Judah usurps his eldest brother and effectively becomes the oldest here.

⁵⁴ This could also be translated as "king of beasts" but the lioness part, plus the word "arouse," helps reinforce the sexual nature of the verse, which stands in opposition to Reuben's misuse of sex as a tool of power against his father. The same use of sex as a tool for a son to challenge his father comes up in David's extended deathbed story, as Adonijah seeks to lay with Abishag who, while never sexual with David, was regarded as "belonging" to him.

⁵⁵ Again, this language is explicitly phallic, reinforcing Judah's power as progenitor, father not only of his tribe but also the Southern Kingdom and eventually the Jewish people who bear his name.

⁵⁶ "This is a notorious crux. The Masoretic Text seems to read 'until he comes to Shiloh,' a dark phrase that has inspired much messianic interpretation. The present translation follows an exegetical tradition that goes back to the Middle Ages, which breaks up the word 'Shiloh' and vocalizes it differently as *shai lo*" (Alter, 194).

וְהוּא	יִשְׁכֵּן	יָמִים	לְחֹף	זְבוּלֻן
and he	he shall dwell	seas	to seashore	Zebulun
עַל-צִידֹן	וּבְרֵכְתּוֹ	אֲנִית	לְחֹף	
upon Sidon	his flank	ship	to seashore	

Zebulun, by the shore of the seas shall he dwell, and he by the safe harbor, his flank upon Sidon.

Genesis 49:14

הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים	בֵּין	רִבֵּץ	גֵּרָם	חֲמֹר	יִשְׁשַׁכָּר
fireplaces	between	stretch out	strong-boned	ass	Issachar

Issachar is a strong-boned ass, he stretches out between hearths.⁵⁷

Genesis 49:15

כִּי	וְאֶת-הָאָרֶץ	טוֹב	כִּי	מִנְחָה	וַיֵּרָא
for	and (to) the land	good	for	resting place	He saw
לְמַסְעָד	וַיְהִי	לְסָבֵל	שְׁכֻמוֹ	וַיִּט	נְעִמָה
as a serf-worker	and he was	to bear	his shoulder	bent/bowed	pleasant

When he saw that the resting place was good and the land was pleasant, he bent his shoulder to bear a load, and he became a laboring serf.

Genesis 49:16

יִשְׂרָאֵל	שְׁבֵטֵי	כְּאַחַד	עַמּוֹ	יִדִּין	דָּן
Israel	tribes of	as one	his people	he will judge	Dan

Dan shall decide⁵⁸ for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

Genesis 49:17

עַל-יֶאֱרַח	שָׁפִיפֹן	עַל-יֶדְרֹךְ	נָחֵשׁ	יְהִי־דָן
upon path	horned snake	upon road	snake	It shall be Dan
אֲחֹר	רֹכֵבוֹ	וַיִּפֹּל	עֲקֵבֵי־סוֹס	הַנֶּשֶׁךְ
backward	his rider	falls	heels of horse	bites

Dan shall be a snake on the road, a horned snake on the path, that bites the heels of a horse so its rider falls backward.

Genesis 49:18

⁵⁷ Lee translates this word as “ash heaps,” which has a negative connotation and would not explain why Issachar would be tempted by the land. JPS translates it as “sheepfolds,” which matches the use of the term in Judges 5:16, the only other place it is used. However, here I follow Robert Alter, who writes that “the verbal stem from which it appears to derive means ‘to set a pot on the fire’ (*The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* 195); the word “hearths” encompasses both the fire and the comforting feeling that would persuade Issachar to settle.

⁵⁸ A more direct translation would be “Dan shall judge” but “decide” captures the alliteration present in the Hebrew. Dan’s name shares the letters of *din*, judge, and demonstrates that his name captures his essential nature and role.

יְהוָה	קָנִיתִי	לִישׁוּעָתְךָ
YHWH	I hope/await	For your deliverance

For your deliverance I await, YHWH!⁵⁹

Genesis 49:19

עֵקֶב	יָגֵד	וְהוּא	יִגְדְּנוּ	גִּדּוּד	גָּד
heel	he will maraud	and he	maraud	marauders	Gad

Gad shall be marauded by marauders, and he shall maraud at their heels.⁶⁰

Genesis 49:20

מַעֲדֵנֵי־מֶלֶךְ	יִתֵּן	וְהוּא	לֶחֶמוֹ	שֶׁמֶנֶה	מֵאֲשֵׁר
dainties of a king	he will give	and he	his bread	fat	From Asher

Asher's bread shall be abundant,⁶¹ and he shall bring forth kingly dainties.

Genesis 49:21

אֲמֵרֵי־שֹׁפָר	הִנָּתַן	שָׁלְחָהּ	אֵילָה	נַפְתָּלִי
beautiful fawns	gives	sent	hind	Naphtali

Naphtali is a hind sent forth, which brings forth beautiful fawns.

Genesis 49:22

פְּרִית	בֶּן	יוֹסֵף	פְּרִית	בֶּן
fruitful	son	Joseph	fruitful	Son

עַל־יֶשׁוֹר	צָעָדָהּ	בָּנוֹת	עַל־עֵין
upon rampart	strode	daughters	upon spring

A fruitful son is Joseph, a fruitful son by a spring; daughters strode by a rampart.⁶²

Genesis 49:23

חֲצִים	בְּעָלֵי	וַיִּשְׁתַּמּוּהוּ	וַיִּבּוּ	וַיִּמְרָרוּהוּ
arrows	owners	they opposed	and they shot	They embittered

Bitterly did the archers shoot and oppose him.

Genesis 49:24

⁵⁹ Here Jacob interrupts his speech to cry out to God. Interestingly, it is the only place in this death scene in which the tetragrammaton is used.

⁶⁰ The amount of repetition in the Hebrew is even greater than can be replicated in the English. It is not just that “maraud” repeats in various forms, but Gad’s name shares the same sound.

⁶¹ The Hebrew here seems to miss an opportunity by not saying that Asher’s bread shall be *ashir*, rich. Granted, the roots of the words are different, עשיר vs אשר, but the oral pun would have fit the pattern used for Dan and Gad.

⁶² This same word comes up in the curse of Simeon and Levi; again a younger brother seems to flip the negative association that elder brothers caused, as Judah does to Reuben with “mounting.” *Shur* is also where the angel of God found Hagar when she ran away from Sarai. Hagar was an Egyptian woman, and Joseph ultimately made his home in Egypt and married an Egyptian woman himself.

וְתָשָׁב	בְּאֵיתָן	קִשְׁתּוֹ	וַיִּפְּזוּ	זְרָעֵי	יָדָיו	מִיָּדָיו
He abided	ever-flowing	his bow	and was agile	his arms	his hands	from the hands
אֲבִיר	יַעֲקֹב	מִשָּׁם	רֹעֶה	אֶבֶן	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
strong	Jacob	from there	shepherd	rock	Israel	

Yet he abided, ever-moving was his bow, agile were his arms and his hands; by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, from there the Shepherd, Rock of Israel.

Genesis 49:25

מֵאל	אֲבִיר	וַיַּעֲזֹרֶךְ	וְאֵת	שַׁדַּי	וַיְבָרֶכְךָ	
From El/God	your fathers	he will help you	and (to)	Shaddai	he blessed you	
בְּרִכַּת	שָׁמַיִם	מֵעַל	בְּרִכַּת	תְּהוֹמוֹת		
blessing of	heaven	from upon	blessings of	deep/depth		
רִבְצָת	תַּחַת	בְּרִכַּת	שָׁדַיִם	וְרֶחֱם		
stretches out	under	blessings of	breast	and womb		

From the God of your fathers, may God help you, and may Shaddai⁶³ bless you with blessings of heaven above and blessings of the deep that stretches out below, blessings of breasts and womb.

Genesis 49:26

בְּרִכַּת	אֲבִיר	גָּבְרוֹן	עַל-בְּרִכַּת	הוֹרִי	עַד-תְּאוֹת	גְּבֻעַת
Blessings of	your father	stronger than	upon blessings of	my forebears	until limit	hills
עוֹלָם	תִּהְיֶינָה	לְרֹאשׁ	יוֹסֵף	וּלְקַדְקֹד	נִזִּיר	אֶחָיו
everlasting	will happen	to head	Joseph	and to brow	consecrated	his brothers

The blessings of your father were greater than the blessings of my forebears, to the limit of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the consecrated of his brothers.⁶⁴

Genesis 49:27

בְּנֵימִין	זָאֵב	יִטְרֹף	בִּבְקָר	יֹאכֵל		
Benjamin	wolf	tear	in the morning	he will eat		
עַד	וְלָעֶרֶב	יִחְלַק	שָׁלִי			
prey/booty	and to the evening	he will divide	spoil			

⁶³ Although separated by three words, here Jacob once again refers to God as El and Shaddai, harkening back to his meeting with Joseph before the other brothers joined. El Shaddai is the God who spoke to Jacob directly of promises in his earlier years, and he continues to pass on that special connection to Joseph, his favored one.

⁶⁴ Here Jacob remarks in front of all the brothers that Joseph is elevated as compared to the rest of them. In some ways this was obvious from much earlier stages in life, and in fact this favoritism led to their bitter hatred of Joseph. Jacob's tendency to play favorites and mess with the family order has not changed even with age. Yet, considering that he blessed Joseph with a double portion just before this scene, it may be wise to at least explicitly inform the others of this decision before death.

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning he shall eat the prey and in the evening he shall divide the spoil.”

Genesis 49:28

וְאֵלֶּה	שְׁבִטֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	שְׁנַיִם	עֶשֶׂר	וְזֹאת
All these	tribes	Israel	two (twelve)	ten	and this
אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר	לָהֶם	אֲבִיהֶם	וַיְבָרֶךְ	אוֹתָם	
which spoke	to them	their father	he blessed	to them	
אִישׁ	אֲשֶׁר	כְּבִרְכָתוֹ	בֵּרַךְ	אֹתָם	
man	which	as his blessing	blessed	to them	

All these are the tribes of Israel, twelve, and this is that which their father spoke to them, and he blessed them, each according to his blessing he blessed them.⁶⁵

Genesis 49:29

וַיֹּצֵא	אוֹתָם	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲלֵהֶם	אָנִי	
He commanded	to them	he said	to them	I	
וְנֶאֱסַף	אֶל־עַמִּי	קִבְרוּ	אֵתִי	אֶל־אֲבֹתִי	
will be gathered	to my people	bury	(to) me	to my fathers	
אֶל־הַמְעֵרָה	אֲשֶׁר	בַּשָּׂדֶה	עֶפְרָיִם	הַחִתִּי	
to the cave	which	in the field	Ephron	the Hittite	

Then he commanded⁶⁶ them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people, bury me with my fathers in the cave which is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

Genesis 49:30

בַּמְעֵרָה	אֲשֶׁר	בַּשָּׂדֶה	הַמַּכְפֵּלָה	אֲשֶׁר	עַל־פְּנֵי־מַמְרֵא
In the cave	which	in the field	the Machpelah	Which	upon the face of Mamre
בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	אֲשֶׁר	קָנָה	אַבְרָהָם	
in the land	Canaan	which	bought	Abraham	
אֶת־הַשָּׂדֶה	מֵאֵת	עֶפְרָיִם	הַחִתִּי	לְאֹחֲזַת־קֶבֶר	
(to) the field	from	Ephron	the Hittite	as possession grave	

⁶⁵ The text uses the root ב.ר.כ. three times in this verse, seeming to insist that what Jacob said to the sons is a “blessing.” One interpretation of this is that even those sons who received harsh words (Reuben, Simon, Levi and Issachar) were in fact blessed to become the heads of tribes and still be counted among the sons of Israel. Another way to approach this idea is to redefine the word and say that a “blessing” in ancient times may not have carried only positive connotations as the term has today. It may be that a prophetic statement or character assessment, no matter how negative, would still be called a *bracha*. Additionally, in Job 2:9, Job’s wife tells him “בֵּרַךְ אֱלֹהִים וּמָת” which many translate as “Curse God and die” even though בֵּרַךְ is generally read as “bless.”

⁶⁶ This verb and the tone is quite clear and assertive. This is a far cry from the approach Jacob took with Joseph, perhaps because he already secured an oath related to his burial, and perhaps because only Joseph held the high position of grand vizier in the Egyptian kingdom.

in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which faces Mamre, in the land of Canaan, the field that Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite as a burial-holding.⁶⁷

Genesis 49:31

שָׁמָּה	קָבְרוּ	אֶת־אֲבִרָהִם	וְאֶת־	סָרָה
There	they buried	(to) Abraham	and (to)	Sarah
אִשְׁתּוֹ	שָׁמָּה	קָבְרוּ	אֶת־יִצְחָק	וְאֶת־
his wife	there	they buried	(to) Isaac	and (to)
רִבְקָה	אִשְׁתּוֹ	וְשָׁמָּה	קָבַרְתִּי	אֶת־לֵאָה
Rebekah	his wife	and there	I buried	(to) Leah

There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah,

Genesis 49:32

מִקְנָה	הַשָּׂדֶה	וְהַמְעָרָה	אֲשֶׁר־בָּהּ	מֵאֵת	בְּנֵי־חֶת
Bought	the field	and the cave	which is in it	from	sons of Heth

The field and the cave⁶⁸ which is in it, bought from the sons of Heth.”

Genesis 49:33

וַיֵּכֶל	יַעֲקֹב	לְצִוּוֹת	אֶת־בָּנָיו	וַיֵּאסֹף
He finished/ceased	Jacob	to command/charge	(to) his sons	he gathered
רַגְלָיו	אֶל־הַמֶּטֶה	וַיָּגוּעַ	וַיֵּאסֹף	אֶל־עַמּוֹ
his feet	to the bed	he expired/died	he was gathered	to his people

And Jacob finished commanding his sons, and he gathered his feet into the bed; he breathed his last⁶⁹ and was gathered to his people.

⁶⁷ The amount of detail provided about the cave is not strictly necessary, particularly the two mentions of Ephron the Hittite. It seems that this is a way for the text to emphasize that the land was purchased properly by Abraham, something it also does in Genesis 23 at the death of Sarah.

⁶⁸ This, of course, being the Cave of Mahpelah, where Jacob is demanding his sons bury his body.

⁶⁹ יָגוּעַ is linked with death, the last breath, or “giving up the ghost,” hence this translation, which follows that of both JPS and Robert Alter.

Translation: Aaron's Death
Numbers 20:22-29, Numbers 33:38-39, Deuteronomy 10:6

Numbers 20:22

וַיֵּסְעוּ	מִקַּדֶּשׁ	וַיָּבֹאוּ	בְּנֵי-יִשְׂרָאֵל
They journeyed	from Kadesh	they came	sons of Israel
כָּל-הָעֵדָה	הָהָר	הַהוּא	הַהָר
all the congregation	Hor		the mountain

They journeyed from Kadesh and the children of Israel came, all the congregation,⁷⁰ to Hor the Mountain.

Numbers 20:23

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל-מֹשֶׁה	וְאֶל-אַהֲרֹן	בְּהָר
He said	Adonai	to Moses	and to Aaron	at Hor
הָהָר	עַל-גְּבוּל	אֶרֶץ-עֲדֹמִים	לֵאמֹר	
the mountain	upon boundary	land Edom	saying	

Adonai spoke to Moses and to Aaron⁷¹ at Hor the Mountain on the border of the land of Edom, saying,

Numbers 20:24

יֵאָסֵף	אַהֲרֹן	אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ	כִּי	לֹא	יָבֹא
Let him be gathered	Aaron	to his people	for	no	he will come
אֶל-הָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַתִּי	לְבְנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
to the land	which	I gave	to the sons of	Israel	
עַל	אֲשֶׁר-מְרִיתֶם	אֶת-פִּי	לְמִי	מְרִיבָה	
upon	which you all rebelled	(to) mouth	to waters	strife	

“Let Aaron be gathered to his people, for he shall not come into the land that I have given to the children of Israel, because you both rebelled against My word at the Waters of Meribah.”⁷²

Numbers 20:25

קח	אֶת-אַהֲרֹן	וְאֶת-אֱלֶעָזָר	בְּנוֹ	וְהֵעַל	אֹתָם	הָהָר
Take	(to) Aaron	and (to) Elazar	his son	and bring up	them	the mountain

⁷⁰ The addition of “all the congregation” after “the children of Israel” is not necessary. It emphasizes the collective, which makes sense given that the scene is about to shift focus onto Aaron, who led and served the whole community. Seeing the people as a unified collective gives honor to the work Aaron did throughout his lifetime.

⁷¹ It is important to note that the text explicitly states that God spoke to Aaron as well as Moses. The rest of the speech in verses 24-26 refers to Aaron in the third person, which might lead a reader to forget that Aaron was privy to this conversation. The fact that he heard the plan for his death, and heard it stated rather impersonally, makes his composure in the scene that much more striking.

⁷² Even though Aaron is dying at an advanced age and in a relatively peaceful manner, the text is explicit that his death is a consequence of a past failure. There is no sugar-coating this punishment, but neither is it portrayed as excessively cruel or vindictive.

“Take Aaron and Elazar his son and bring them up Hor the Mountain.

Numbers 20:26

וְהַפְשֵׁט	אֶת־אַהֲרֹן	אֶת־בְּגָדָיו	וְהִלְבִּשְׁתֶּם	אֶת־אֱלָעָזָר
Strip	(to) Aaron	(to) his clothes	and dress them	(to) Elazar
בְּנוֹ	וְאַהֲרֹן	יֵאָסֵף	וּמָת	שָׁם
his son	and Aaron	he will be gathered	and he will die	there

“Then, strip Aaron of his garments and clothe with them Elazar his son; and Aaron will be gathered up⁷³ and will die there.”

Numbers 20:27

וַיַּעַשׂ	מֹשֶׁה	כְּאֲשֶׁר	צִוָּה	יְהוָה
He did	Moses	as	He commanded	Adonai
וַיַּעֲלוּ ⁷⁴	אֶל־הָרֹאשׁ	הַהָרִי	לְעֵינֵי	כָּל־הָעֵדָה
they went up	(to) Hor	the mountain	to the eyes of	all the congregation

Moses did as Adonai had commanded; they went up to Hor the Mountain before the eyes of all the congregation.

Numbers 20:28

וַיַּפְשֵׁט	מֹשֶׁה	אֶת־אַהֲרֹן	אֶת־בְּגָדָיו	וַיְלִבֵּשׁ	אֹתָם
He stripped	Moses	(to) Aaron	(to) his clothes	he dressed	them
אֶת־אֱלָעָזָר	בְּנוֹ	וּמָת	אַהֲרֹן	שָׁם	בְּרֹאשׁ
(to) Elazar	his son	he died	Aaron	there	on head
הָרִי	וַיֵּרֵד	מֹשֶׁה	וְאֱלָעָזָר	מִן־הָרִי	
the mountain	he descended	Moses	and Elazar	from the mountain	

Moses stripped Aaron of his garments and he clothed with them Elazar his son, and Aaron died there on the top of the mountain; Moses descended, and Elazar, from the mountain.

Numbers 20:29

וַיִּרְאוּ	כָּל־הָעֵדָה	כִּי	גָעַ ⁷⁵	אַהֲרֹן	וַיִּבְכוּ
They saw	all the congregation	for	expired	Aaron	they wept
אֶת־אַהֲרֹן	שְׁלִשִּׁים	יּוֹם	כָּל	בֵּית	יִשְׂרָאֵל
(to) Aaron	thirty	day	all	house	Israel

⁷³ This same verb is found in Jacob’s deathbed scene four times, in Genesis 49:1 when Jacob gathers his sons, and more relevantly once in verse 29 and twice in verse 33, when he is gathered to his people and gathers his feet. While it may simply be part of a phrase related to dying, the idea of being “gathered” in some way upon death, rather than decomposing or falling apart seems both counterintuitive and comforting.

⁷⁴ Although in the big picture Moses did as God commanded, there is a significant change in that Moses did not bring Aaron up the mountain, but the three figures all actively walked up. This shows remarkable strength and dignity as Aaron faces his own death with full knowledge of what awaits atop the mountain.

⁷⁵ This same verb occurs in Jacob’s death scene, Genesis 49:33.

And all the congregation saw⁷⁶ that Aaron had expired; and they bewailed Aaron thirty days, all the house of Israel.

Numbers 33:38

יְהוָה	עַל־כִּי	הָהָר	אֶל־הָהָר	הַכֹּהֵן	אֶהֱרֹן	וַיַּעֲלֶה
YHVH	because	the mountain	to Hor	the priest	Aaron	He went up
בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל	לִצְאת	הָאַרְבָּעִים	בְּשָׁנָה	שָׁם	וַיָּמָת	
children of Israel	exit	the fortieth	in the year	there	he died	
לְחֹדֶשׁ	בְּאַחַד	הַחֲמִישִׁי	בְּחֹדֶשׁ	מִצְרַיִם	מֵאֶרֶץ	
to the month	on one	the fifth	in the month	Egypt	from land	

Aaron the priest ascended Hor the Mountain at the word of YHVH and he died there in the fortieth year of the children of Israel's going out from the land of Egypt, in the fifth month on the first of the month.

Numbers 33:39

וּמֵאֶת	וְעֶשְׂרִים	בֶּן־שָׁלֹשׁ	וְאֶהֱרֹן	
and one hundred	and twenty	son thirty	And Aaron	
הָהָר	בְּהָר	בְּמָוֶתוֹ	שָׁנָה	
the mountain	on Hor	in his death	year	

And Aaron was one hundred and twenty-three years old at his death on Hor the Mountain.⁷⁷

Deuteronomy 10:6

וּבְנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	נָסְעוּ	מִבְּאֶרֶת	בְּנֵי־יָעֲקֹן
And the sons	Israel	journeyed	from Beeroth	B'nei Yaakan
מוֹסֶרָה	שָׁם	מָת	אֶהֱרֹן	וַיִּקְבֹּר
toward Moserah	there	he died	Aaron	he was buried
שָׁם	וַיַּכְהֵן	אֶלְעָזָר	בְּנוֹ	תַּחְתָּיו ⁷⁸
there	he acted as priest	Elazar	his son	under him

⁷⁶ It is surprising to use the verb “to see” here, given that the reader assumes Aaron’s death occurred atop the mountain out of sight of the congregation. More likely they “understood” that Aaron had died, but in saying that they “saw” the text adds certainty to the scene. It may be going too far to read it this way, but I sense some amount of repair from the scene of the golden calf, Aaron’s greatest error that goes unmentioned even in this death scene. Then, the people were without one leader and were driven to sin by the uncertainty they felt; here, all their leaders ascend the mountain, but they wait and collectively understand and appropriately respond to the events that unfolded out of sight.

⁷⁷ Providing Aaron’s advanced age explicitly marks his life as generally blessed, even if his death is seen as a punishment. Unlike so many others in Numbers, he was not cut down at an early age for his sin(s).

⁷⁸ This same word is used in David’s deathbed scene, I Kings 1:30 and I Kings 1:35, for Solomon taking over leadership from David. This is also the case elsewhere in the Torah, including the consecutive list of the kings of Edom in Genesis 36, the succession plan for Aaron described in Exodus 29:30, and the succession of many other Israelite rulers throughout the Book of Kings.

And the children of Israel journeyed from Beeroth-Bene-Jaakan toward Moserah;⁷⁹ there, Aaron died, and he was buried there, and Elazar his son served as priest in his stead.

⁷⁹ Note the change in place name, possibly from another tradition. This discrepancy is remarkable when one reads it against Jacob's deathbed scenes, in which he very explicitly and repetitively details his desired burial place. A key difference is that the Israelites are not hoping to stake a claim outside of the Promised Land, where Aaron dies.

Translation: David's Death

I Kings 1:28-2:12

I Kings 1:28

וַיַּעַן	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד	וַיֹּאמֶר	קְרָאוּלִי	לְבַת־שֶׁבַע
He answered	the king	David	he said	call to me	to Batsheva
וַתָּבֹא	לִפְנֵי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	וַתַּעֲמֵד	לִפְנֵי	הַמֶּלֶךְ
she came	before	the king	she stood	before	the king

King David answered, and he said, "Call Bathsheba to me!" So, she came before the king and stood before the king.⁸⁰

I Kings 1:29

וַיִּשָּׁבַע	הַמֶּלֶךְ	וַיֹּאמֶר	חַי־יְהוָה
He swore	the king	he said	live Adonai
אֲשֶׁר־פָּדָה	אֶת־נַפְשִׁי	מִכָּל־צָרָה	
which rescued	(to) my soul	from all strait/distress	

The king swore and said, "As Adonai Lives, Who rescued my very being from every strait,

I Kings 1:30

לִי	כַּאֲשֶׁר	נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	לָךְ	בַּיהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי
For	which	I swore	to you	by Adonai	God of
יִשְׂרָאֵל	לֵאמֹר	כִּי־שְׁלֹמֹה	בְּנֶךְ	יִמְלֹךְ	
Israel	saying	for Solomon	your son	shall reign	
אַחֲרָי	וְהוּא	יֹשֵׁב	עַל־כִּסְאִי	תַּחְתָּי ⁸¹	
after me	and he	shall sit	upon my throne	under me	
כִּי	כֵן	אֶעֱשֶׂה	קִיּוֹם	הַזֶּה	
for	yes	I shall make	today	this	

"as I swore to you by Adonai, God of Israel, saying, 'For Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead!'⁸² thus I shall do this day."

I Kings 1:31

וַתִּקֹּד	בַּת־שֶׁבַע	אֶפְרַיִם	אֶרֶץ	וַתִּשְׁתַּחוּ	לַמֶּלֶךְ
She bowed down	Batsheva	nostrils	earth	she bowed down	to the king

⁸⁰ Including "the king" at the end, rather than simply "him" sounds a bit clunky in the English, but it reflects the repetition present in the Hebrew. מֶלֶךְ is used three times in this single verse, emphasizing that while David may be approaching death and being influenced by others, he remains solidly in power.

⁸¹ As referenced in a footnote to Aaron's death scene, again this word appears to describe a son taking on a leadership role from his dying father.

⁸² There is no explicit evidence of this promise to Bathsheba in earlier chapters. However, the Tanach is known to be a laconic book, and it is possible that such a promise was given earlier and not recorded. Given that David directly quotes himself rather than making a vague statement, that many details of his relationship with Bathsheba are missing from the text, and that he is so resolute in this decision, it seems entirely plausible to me that he is referring to an earlier conversation to which the reader was not privy.

וַתֹּאמֶר	יְהִי	אֲדֹנָי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד	לְעֹלָם
she said	he will live	my lord	the king	David	forever

Bathsheba did obeisance⁸³, her nostrils to the ground,⁸⁴ she bowed down to the king and said, “May my lord⁸⁵ The King David live forever!”

1 Kings 1:32

וַיֹּאמֶר	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד	קְרָאוּלִי	לְצִדּוֹק	הַכֹּהֵן	וּלְנָתָן
He said	the king	David	call to me	to Zadok	the priest	and to Nathan
הַנָּבִיא	וּלְבִנְיָהוּ	בֶן־יְהוֹאִידָע	וַיָּבֹאוּ	לִפְנֵי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	
the prophet	and to Benaiah	son of Jehoaida	they came	before	the king	

Then, King David said, “Call Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoaida to me.” And they came before the king.

1 Kings 1:33

וַיֹּאמֶר	הַמֶּלֶךְ	לָהֶם	קְחוּ	עִמָּכֶם	
He said	the king	to them	take	with you all	
אֶת־עַבְדֵי	אֲדֹנֵיכֶם	וְהִרְכַּבְתֶּם	אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה	בְּנִי	
(to) servants of	your lord	you all mount	(to) Solomon	my son	
עַל־הַפָּרְדָּה	אֲשֶׁר־לִי	וְהוֹרַדְתֶּם	אֹתוֹ	אֶל־גִּחוֹן	
upon the mule	which is to me	you all bring down	him	to Gihon	

The king said to them, “Take with you your lord’s servants, and mount Solomon my son upon the mule⁸⁶ which is mine and bring him down to Gihon.

1 Kings 1:34

וּמִשַּׁח	אֹתוֹ	שָׁם	צִדּוֹק	הַכֹּהֵן	
Anoint	him	there	Zadok	the priest	
וַיָּנִיחַ	הַנָּבִיא	לְמֶלֶךְ	עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַתִּקְעֹתֶם	

⁸³ The choice of this word matches Alter’s translation (pp 438), helps to make a distinction in English between two different verbs with similar meanings, and maintains the ה.ש.ח.ה. root that readers and daveners know as “bow down.”

⁸⁴ This phrase mirrors that of Joseph in Genesis 48:12, who also bowed down with his nose to the ground as his father Jacob blessed Manasseh and Ephraim. In addition to showing deep gratitude, this action links both Bathsheba and Joseph as parents who ensured the future of their children.

⁸⁵ Calling a king “my lord” is not necessarily notable. However, David refers to God in verses 29 and 30 by the name Adonai, and in verse 31 Bathsheba calls him *adoni* (this similarity is best captured in English by the words Lord and lord, though the use of Lord to refer to God is avoided here because it is gendered male). The use of Adonai and *adoni* back-to-back occurs repeatedly in the story of Abigail, who appears to use this conflation to flatter David, remind him of his power, and guide him toward right action. Though more subtle, Bathsheba may be doing the same in this scene.

⁸⁶ The mule developed into a marker of Divine favor and power, coming to symbolize the messiah. Zachariah 9:9 is often pointed to as the origin of this belief, which is then taken up in the Gospels when Mark 11 records Jesus riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. Zachariah uses the word חמור instead of פרדה, but these humble animals being used to indicate the greatness of the leaders riding them is a consistent theme.

you all blow	upon Israel	to king	the prophet	and Nathan
בְּשׁוֹפָר	וְאַמַּרְתֶּם	יְחִי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה
on the shofar	and you all said	live	the king	Solomon

“Then, Zadok the priest shall anoint him there, with Nathan the prophet, as king over Israel; you shall sound the shofar and say, ‘Long live King Solomon!’

I Kings 1:35

וְעַלִּיתֶם	אַחֲרָיו	וּבֹא	וְיָשֵׁב	עַל־כִּסְאִי
You all go up	after him	and come	and sit	upon my throne
וְהָיָה	יְמֻלֶּךְ	תַּחְתִּי	וְאֵתּוֹ	צִוִּיתִי
and he	will reign	under me	and to him	I command
לְהִיטֹת	נָגִיד	עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	וְעַל־יְהוּדָה	
to be	leader	upon Israel	and upon Judah	

“You shall go up after him, and he shall come and sit upon my throne, and he shall reign in my stead,⁸⁷ and him I have charged to be leader over Israel and over Judah.”

I Kings 1:36

וַיַּעַן	בְּנֵיָהוּ	בֶן־יְהוֹיָדָע	אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ	וַיֹּאמֶר	אָמֵן
He answered	Benaiah	son of Jehoaida	(to) the king	he said	amen
כֵּן	יֹאמַר	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי	אֲדֹנָי	הַמֶּלֶךְ
thus	he say	YHVH	God of	my lord	the king

Benaiah son of Jehoaida answered the king and said, “Amen! May thus say YHVH, God of my lord the king.

I Kings 1:37

כַּאֲשֶׁר	הָיָה	יְהוָה	עִם־אֲדֹנָי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	כֵּן	הִיאִיָּהּ (הִיא)
That which	was	YHVH	with my lord	the king	thus	he is
עִם־שְׁלֹמֹה	וַיִּגְדַּל	אֶת־כִּסְאוֹ	מִכִּסֵּא	אֲדֹנָי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד
with Solomon	may he grow	(to) his throne	from throne	my lord	the king	David

“As YHVH was with my lord the king, thus may God be with Solomon; may he make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord, Kind David.”⁸⁸

⁸⁷ Once again, תחת is used to refer to a son taking the leadership role of his father. It is done here in verses 30 and 35, as well as Deuteronomy 10:6.

⁸⁸ It is interesting to have loyal servants of King David wish for Solomon to be even greater than his father, particularly given how egotistical David appears throughout his life. However, there is no indication in the text that David is offended by these words, and the plan unfolds as he ordered. In fact, according to Jonathan’s report, when Solomon sat upon David’s throne the same wish was expressed (I Kings 1:47), and David bowed down in response. It is possible this communicates a seemingly universal wish by a parent that their child be even more successful. It is also possible something more particular to David is unfolding, because he was barred from constructing the Temple but Solomon will be allowed to accomplish that holy task.

I Kings 1:38

וַיֵּרֶד	צָדוֹק	הַכֹּהֵן	וְנָתָן	הַנָּבִיא	וּבְנֵיָהוּ
He went down	Zadok	the priest	and Nathan	the prophet	and Benaiah
בֶּן־יְהוֹיָדָע	וְהַכְרִיתִי	וְהַפְלִיתִי	וַיִּרְכְּבוּ	אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה	(to) Solomon
son of Jehoiada	and the Cherithites	and the Pelethites	they mounted		
עַל־פָּרָדָיִת	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד	וַיֵּלְכוּ	אֵתוֹ	עַל־גִּחוֹן
upon mule	the king	David	they walked	him	upon Gihon

Zadok the priest went down, with Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherithites and the Pelethites, and they mounted Solomon upon the mule of King David; they led him to Gihon.

I Kings 1:39

וַיִּקַּח	צָדוֹק	הַכֹּהֵן	אֶת־קֶרֶן	הַשֶּׁמֶן	the oil
He took	Zadok	the priest	(to) horn		
מִן־הָאֹהֶל	וַיִּמָּשַׁח	אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה	וַיִּתְקְעוּ	בַּשּׁוֹפָר	on the shofar
from the tent	he anointed	(to) Solomon	they blew (sounded)		
וַיֹּאמְרוּ	כָּל־הָעָם	יְחִי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה	Solomon
they said	all the nation	live	the king		

Zadok the priest took the horn of oil from the Tent and anointed Solomon; then they sounded the shofar and all the people said, “Long live King Solomon!”

I Kings 1:40

וַיַּעֲלוּ	כָּל־הָעָם	אַחֲרָיו	וְהָעָם	מִחֲלָלִים	בַּחֲלָלִים
They went up	all the people	after him	and the nation	they played	on the flutes
וַשְׂמֵחִים	שְׂמֵחָה	גְּדוּלָּה	וַתִּבָּקַע	הָאָרֶץ	בְּקוֹלָם
they were happy	happy	great	it split open	the earth	by their voice

All the people went up after him, and the people were playing flutes and making merry so greatly that the earth split open from their noise.⁸⁹

I Kings 1:41

וַיִּשְׁמַע	אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ	וְכָל־הַקָּרְאִים	אֲשֶׁר	אֵלָיו	וְהֵם
He heard	Adonijah	and all the invitees	which	to him	and they
כָּלוּ	לֶאֱכֹל	וַיִּשְׁמַע	יֹאב	אֶת־קוֹל	(to) voice
they finished	to eat	he heard	Yoav		
הַשּׁוֹפָר	וַיֹּאמֶר	מִדְּוַע	קוֹל־הַקְּרִיָּה	הוֹמָה	

⁸⁹ This imagery of the earth splitting open evokes the story of Korah, when the same thing occurred as a deadly punishment rather than a sign of overwhelming celebration. A more subtle but similar allusion, then, is to revelation at Sinai, when another קול was overpowering but wonderful.

she roars	voice the town	why	he said	the shofar
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Adonijah heard, and all the invitees who were with him, and they had finished eating; Yoav heard the sound of the shofar and said, “Why is the sound of the town so uproarious?”

1 Kings 1:42

הַכֹּהֵן	בֶּן־אַבִּיָּתָר	יוֹנָתָן	וַהֲגִה	מְדַבֵּר	עוֹדְנוּ
the priest	son of Abiathar	Jonathan	and behold	he speaks	Yet/still
כִּי	בָּא	אַדְנִיָּהוּ	וַיֹּאמֶר	בָּא	
for	come	Adonijah	he said	come	
תִּבְשֹׂר	וְטוֹב	אַתָּה	חַיִּל	אִישׁ	
you will bear news	and good	he	might	man	

He was still speaking when, behold, Jonathan son of Abiathar the priest came; Adonijah said, “Come! For you are a valiant man and you will surely bear good news!”⁹⁰

1 Kings 1:43

לְאַדְנִיָּהוּ	וַיֹּאמֶר	יֹנָתָן	וַיַּעַן	
to Adonijah	he said	Jonathan	He answered	
אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה	הַמֶּלֶךְ	הַמֶּלֶךְ־דָּוִד	אַדְנִיָּנוּ	אֲבָל
(to) Solomon	he made king	the king David	our lord	but

But Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, “Our lord King David has made Solomon king.

1 Kings 1:44

וְאֶת־נָתָן	הַכֹּהֵן	אֶת־צִדּוֹק	אֵתָו־הַמֶּלֶךְ	וַיִּשְׁלַח
and to Nathan	the priest	(to) Zadok	to him the king	He sent
וְהַפְּלִי	וְהַכְרִיתִי	בֶּן־יְהוֹיָדָע	וּבְנִיָּהוּ	הַנָּבִיא
and the Pelethites	the Cherethites	son of Jehoiada	and Benaiah	the prophet
הַמֶּלֶךְ	פָּרָדָת	עַל	אֵלָיו	וַיִּרְכְּבוּ
the king	she-mule	upon	to him	they mounted

“He sent with him Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and the Cherethites and the Pelethites; they mounted him upon the mule of the king.

1 Kings 1:45

הַנָּבִיא	וְנָתָן	הַכֹּהֵן	צִדּוֹק	אֵלָיו	וַיִּמְשְׁחוּ
the prophet	and Nathan	the priest	Zadok	to him	They anointed

⁹⁰ Here the text builds in a bitter irony for Adonijah. He is so convinced that Jonathan will bear good news that he calls him a valiant man and says surely this will be the case. This verse makes Adonijah look fundamentally out of touch with the palace and the people, and it makes his shift from potential successor to pretender to the throne and enemy of the king even more dramatic.

וְתָהִם ⁹¹	שְׂמֵחִים	מִשָּׁם	וַיַּעֲלוּ	בְּגִחוֹן	לְמֶלֶךְ
she roared	they were happy	from there	they went up	in Gihon	to king
שְׂמַעְתֶּם	אֲשֶׁר	הַקּוֹל	הוּא	הַקִּירָה	
you all heard	which	the voice	he	the town	

“And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed him king at Gihon,⁹² and they went up from there making merry, and the town was in uproar; this was the sound that you heard.”⁹³

I Kings 1:46

וְגַם	יָשָׁב	שְׁלֹמֹה	עַל	כִּסֵּא	הַמְּלוּכָה
And also	he sat	Solomon	upon	chair	the kingship

“And what is more, Solomon sat upon the royal throne.

I Kings 1:47

וְגַם-בָּאוּ	עַבְדֵי	הַמֶּלֶךְ	לְבָרֵךְ	אֶת-אֲדֹנָיו	הַמֶּלֶךְ	דָּוִד
And also	servants	the king	to bless/kneel	(to) our lord	the king	David
לֵאמֹר	יִיטֵב	[אֱלֹהִים] (אֱלֹהֶיךָ)	אֶת-שֵׁם	שְׁלֹמֹה	מִשְׁמֶךָ	
saying	He will be good	God/your God	(to) name	Solomon	from your name	
וַיִּגְדֵּל	אֶת-כִּסְאוֹ	מִכִּסְאוֹ	וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	הַמֶּלֶךְ	עַל-הַמִּשְׁכָּב	
he will grow	(to) his chair	from your chair	and he bowed down	the king	upon the couch	

“And what is more, servants of the king blessed our lord King David saying, ‘May God make Solomon’s name even better than your name and make his throne even greater than your throne!’ And the king bowed down on his couch.”⁹⁴

I Kings 1:48

וְגַם-כֵּן	אָמַר	הַמֶּלֶךְ	בְּרוּךְ	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
And also this	he said	the king	blessed	YHWH	God of	Israel
אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	כִּיּוֹם	יָשָׁב	עַל-כִּסְאוֹ	וַעֲבָדֵי	רָאוּ

⁹¹ The same word was used in I Samuel 4:5 when Israel celebrates the return of the Ark of the Covenant to the camp, a connection that could foreshadow the construction of the Temple under Solomon, when the Ark will finally have a proper home.

⁹² Gihon is one of the four rivers that flows from Eden, listed in the Creation story (Genesis 2:13). The use of this river adds legitimacy to Solomon’s rule, as if his kingship was ordained from the beginning, as if his rule could bring about a more idyllic and peaceful past. Additionally, Gihon is listed as the second river, and while technically Solomon is the third king over Israel, he is the second in the Davidic line, the second one to be favored consistently by God.

⁹³ Everything relayed to this point the reader already knew, but the next verses provide new information. It is interesting that the interaction between David and Solomon in the throne room are described not by an omniscient narrator, but by someone reporting to Solomon’s unsuccessful rival. Rather than simply rejoicing in the success of Solomon, the reader becomes acutely aware of the fear experienced by Adonijah.

⁹⁴ Having a father bow to a son also occurs with Jacob, in Genesis 47:31. In both scenes the fathers bow upon their resting place, either a bed for Jacob or a couch for David. Both men can be seen as expressing gratitude and/or releasing tension as a key deathbed wish is fulfilled.

they see	and my eyes	upon my chair	he sat	today	he gave	which
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“And what is more,⁹⁵ the king said, ‘Blessed is YHVH, God of Israel, Who has granted today that he sits upon my throne and my eyes behold it!’”⁹⁶

I Kings 1:49

אֲשֶׁר	כָּל־הַקָּרְאִים	וַיִּקְמוּ	וַיִּחַרְדּוּ
which	all the invitees	they arose	They trembled
לְדַרְכּוֹ	אִישׁ	וַיֵּלְכוּ	לְאֲדֹנִיָּהוּ
to his path	man	they went	to Adonijah

Then, all the invitees of Adonijah trembled and arose, and each man went on his way.

I Kings 1:50

וַיָּקָם	שְׁלֹמֹה	מִפְּנֵי	יָרָא	וְאֲדֹנִיָּהוּ
he arose	Solomon	from before	he fears	And Adonijah
הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	בְּקַרְנוֹת	וַיַּחֲזֶק	וַיֵּלֶךְ	
the altar	on horns	he strengthened	he went	

And Adonijah was fearful of Solomon, and he arose and went off and took hold of the horns of the altar.

I Kings 1:51

וַיִּגַּד	לְשֹׁלֹמֹה	לֵאמֹר	הִנֵּה	אֲדֹנִיָּהוּ
It was told	to Solomon	saying	behold	Adonijah
יָרָא	אֶת־הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה	וַיִּהְיֶה	אֲחֻזַּ
he fears	(to) the king	Solomon	and behold	he took hold
בְּקַרְנוֹת	הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	לֵאמֹר	יִשָּׁבַע־לִי	כִּיּוֹם
horns	the altar	saying	he will swear to me	as day
הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה	אִם־יָמִית	אֶת־עַבְדּוֹ	בְּחֶרֶב
the king	Solomon	if he will kill	(to) his servant	with the sword

It was told to Solomon saying, “Behold, Adonijah is fearful of King Solomon, and behold he took hold of the horns of the altar saying, ‘Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death by the sword.’”

⁹⁵ The repetition of “and what is more” in verses 46, 47, and 48 serves two purposes. First, it indicates to the reader that the information in these three verses has not yet been relayed by the text and is “more” than they knew prior to Jonathan’s report. Second, it appears to twist the knife for Adonijah, as if there is no end to the story of his rival’s success and his own downfall. Whether this was intentional on the part of Jonathan is unclear, but it seems like a wise literary decision by the author(s) of the text.

⁹⁶ Again, this is reported by Jonathan rather than an omniscient narrator. However, if it is true, David’s statement makes explicit what was implicit in verse 37. Then, David did not respond when Benaiah son of Jehoida wished greater success for Solomon. His assent was implied there, but here he responds to the same wish by blessing God for allowing him to see the ascension of Solomon to the throne.

I Kings 1:52

וַיֹּאמֶר	שְׁלֹמֹה	אִם	יְהִי־הָ	לְבֶן־חַיִּל	לֹא־יִפֹּל
He said	Solomon	if	he will be	to son valiant	he will not fall
מִשְׁעָרָתוֹ	אֶרֶצָה	וְאִם־רָעָה	תִּמְצָא־בּוֹ	וּמָת	
a single hair of his	to the ground	and if evil	will be found in him	he will die	

Solomon said, “If he proves to be a valiant fellow, not a single hair of his shall fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he shall die.”⁹⁷

I Kings 1:53

וַיִּשְׁלַח	הַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה	וַיִּירְדּוּהוּ	מֵעַל	הַמִּזְבֵּחַ	וַיָּבֹא
He sent	the king	Solomon	they took him down	from upon	the altar	he came
וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ	לַמֶּלֶךְ	שְׁלֹמֹה	וַיֹּאמֶר־לּוֹ	שְׁלֹמֹה	לֵךְ	לְבֵיתְךָ
he bowed down	to the king	Solomon	he said to him	Solomon	go	to your house

King Solomon sent, and they took him down from the altar, and he came and bowed down to King Solomon; Solomon said to him, “Go to your house.”

I Kings 2:1

וַיִּקְרְבוּ	יְמֵי־דָוִד	לָמוּת	וַיֹּצֵא	אֶת־שְׁלֹמֹה	בְּנוֹ	לֵאמֹר
They came near	days of David	to die	he commanded	(to) Solomon	his son	saying

David’s time to die drew near, and he commanded⁹⁸ Solomon his son saying,

I Kings 2:2

אֲנִי	הֵלֶךְ	בַּדֶּרֶךְ	כָּל־הָאָרֶץ	וְחִזַּקְתָּ	וְהָיִיתָ	לְאִישׁ
I	going	on the way	all the earth	strengthen	and be	as a man

“I am going the way of all the earth;⁹⁹ be strong and be as a man.

I Kings 2:3

וּשְׁמַרְתָּ	אֶת־מִשְׁמַרְתִּי	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	לָלֶכֶת	בְּדַרְכּוֹ
Guard/Keep	(to) charge	YHVH	your God	to walk	in His ways
לְשָׁמֵר	חֻקֵּי	מִצְוֹתָיו	וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו	וְעֵדוּתָיו	כַּכְּתוּב
to guard/keep	his statutes	his commandments	and his ordinances	his testimony	as it is written
בְּתוֹרַת	מֹשֶׁה	לְמַעַן	תִּשְׁכִּיל	אֵת	כָּל־אֲשֶׁר
in the Torah of	Moses	in order to	you shall prosper	to	all which

⁹⁷ The use of אם/if twice in this verse may be a marker of Solomon’s wisdom. Adonijah made a straightforward request, but Solomon is smart enough to answer with a conditional promise. In his first act as king, Solomon shows that he is a shrewd ruler with foresight.

⁹⁸ Although “commanded” sounds somewhat harsh in the English for this final interaction, it both mirrors Jacob’s final interaction with his sons (Genesis 49:29) and helps David retain authority even after he has passed the throne to Solomon and as he is dying.

⁹⁹ This is a particularly beautiful phrase for death, linking the dying person with all other organisms on earth, with the path of both fate and nature.

תַּעֲשֶׂה	וְאֵת	כָּל־אֲשֶׁר	תִּפְנֶה	שָׁם
you shall do	and to	all which	you shall turn	there

“Keep the charge of YHVH your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, and His ordinances and His admonitions,¹⁰⁰ as it is written in the Torah of Moses, in order that you may prosper in everything that you do and in everything to which you turn.

1 Kings 2:4

לְמַעַן	יִקְיָם	יְהוָה	אֶת־דְּבָרֹוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר
In order that	he will fulfill	YHVH	(to) his word	which	he spoke
עָלַי	לֵאמֹר	אִם־יִשְׁמְרוּ	בְּנֵיךְ	אֶת־דִּרְכָם	לֵלֶכֶת
upon me	saying	if they keep	your sons	(to) their ways	to walk
לִפְנֵי	בְּאֵמֶת	בְּכָל־לִבָּבָם	וּבְכָל־נַפְשָׁם	לֵאמֹר	לֹא־יִכָּרֵת
before me	in truth	with all their heart	and with all their soul	saying	not be cut off
לָךְ	אִישׁ	מֵעַל	כִּסֵּא	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
to you	man	from upon	chair	Israel	

“In order that YHVH shall fulfill His word that He spoke unto me saying, ‘If your sons keep their way to walk before Me in truth, with all their heart and with all their soul, no man of yours shall be cut off from the throne of Israel.’

1 Kings 2:5

וְגַם	אֵתָהּ	יָדַעַת	אֵתְךָ	אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂה	
And what is more	you	you know	to	which he did	
לִי	יֹאב	בֶּן־זְרוּיָהּ	אֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	
to me	Yoav	son of Zeruiah	which	he did	
לְשְׁנֵי־שָׂרִי	צְבָאוֹת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְאַבְנֵר	בֶּן־נֵר	
to two chiefs	hosts	Israel	to Abner	son of Ner	
וְלַעֲמָשָׂא	בֶּן־יֶתֶר	וַיַּהַרְגֵם	וַיִּשֶׂם	דָּמֵי־מִלְחָמָה	
and to Amasa	son of Jether	he killed them	he set	blood of war	
בְּשָׁלֶם	וַיֵּתֶן	דָּמֵי	מִלְחָמָה	בְּחִגְרָתֹו	
in peace	and gave	blood of	war	on his girdle	
אֲשֶׁר	בְּמַתְּנָיו	וּבְנִעְלָיו	אֲשֶׁר	בְּרַגְלָיו	
which	on his loins	and on his sandals	which	on his feet	

“And what is more, you yourself know that which Yoav son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to two chiefs of the armies of Israel, to Abner son of Ner and to Amasa son of Jether: he killed them and

¹⁰⁰ I feel conflicted as a translator including “His” in the English, because where possible I believe it is preferable to avoid gendered language for God. However, “His” mirrors the repeated masculine singular ending in the Hebrew. Additionally, these are the words of a specific character rather than an omniscient narrator. David may have understood God as masculine, and translating his words directly communicates his specific understanding, not anything universal or unquestionably factual.

shed blood of war in peace, and put the blood of war on the girdle around his loins and on the sandals on his feet.

1 Kings 2:6

וְעָשִׂיתָ	כְּחִכְמָתְךָ	וְלֹא-תוֹרֵד	שִׁיבְתּוֹ	בְּשָׁלֶם	שְׁאֵל
You will do	as your wisdom	and not go down	his gray hair	in peace	Sheol

“So, you must act in your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace.

1 Kings 2:7

וְלִבְנֵי	בָּרְזַלַּי	הַגִּלְעָדִי	תַּעֲשֶׂה-חֶסֶד	וְהָיוּ	בְּאֲכָלִי	שִׁלְחֶנְךָ
And to sons of	Barzillai	the Gileadite	you will do kindness	they were	in eating	your table

כִּי-כֵן	קָרְבוּ	אֵלַי	בְּרֹחִי	מִפְנֵי	אֲבִשְׁלוֹם	אֲחִיךָ
for yes	they came near	to me	in my fleeing	from before	Absalom	your brother

“And to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, act kindly, and let them eat at your table, for thus they drew near to me when I fled from Absalom your brother.

1 Kings 2:8

וְהִנֵּה	עִמָּךְ	שִׁמְעִי	בֶן-גֵּרָא	בֶן-הַיְמִינִי	מִבְּחֻרִים
And behold	with you	Shimei	son of Gera	son of the right hand	from Bahurim

וְהוּא	קָלְלָנִי	קָלְלָה	נִמְרָצָה	בַּיּוֹם	לָכֵתִי
and he	treated me with contempt	curse	it was grievous	on the day	I went

מַחֲנַיִם	וְהוּא יָרַד	לְקָרְאֵתִי	הַיַּרְדֵּן	וְאֶשְׁבַּע
Mahanaim	and he went down	to call me	the Jordan	I swore

לּוֹ	בִּיהוָה	לֵאמֹר	אִם-אֶמְיִתְךָ	בְּחֶרֶב
to him	by YHVH	saying	if I kill you	by sword

“And behold, with you is Shimei son of Gera the Benjaminite from Bahurim, and he cursed me with a grievous curse on the day I went to Mahanaim; he went down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by YHVH saying, ‘I will not put you to death by the sword.’¹⁰¹

1 Kings 2:9

וְעַתָּה	אֶל-תִּנְקְלוֹהוּ	כִּי	אִישׁ	חָכָם	אַתָּה	יָדַעְתָּ
And now	do not clear him	for	man	wise	you	you know

אֵת	אֲשֶׁר	תַּעֲשֶׂה-לּוֹ	וְהוֹרַדְתָּ	אֶת-שִׁיבְתּוֹ	בְּדָם	שְׁאֵל
(to)	which	you will do to him	you will send down	(to) his gray hair	in blood	Sheol

¹⁰¹ Compare David’s simple response to Solomon’s more complex one to Adonijah just a few verses earlier. Adonijah asked for this very promise, but Solomon resisted and made his survival conditional upon his actions. On the one hand, it is disappointing that David is acting in a duplicitous manner, keeping Shimei close and then asking Solomon to do his dirty work posthumously. Getting others to execute his enemies is unfortunately a pattern David is unable to break even on his deathbed. On the other hand, it is possible David became aware of Solomon’s wise response to Adonijah and already sees the ways in which his son will prove more successful as king.

“And now, do not hold him innocent, for you are a wise man and you know what you shall do to him, and send down his gray hair in blood to Sheol.”

I Kings 2:10

וַיִּשְׁכַּב	דָּוִד	עִם־אָבֹתָיו	וַיִּקְבֹּר	בְּעִיר	דָּוִד
He lay down	David	with his fathers	he was buried	in the city	David

Then David lay with his fathers, and he was buried in the City of David.

I Kings 2:11

וְהַיָּמִים	אֲשֶׁר	מֶלֶךְ	דָּוִד	עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	אַרְבָּעִים
And the days	which	reigned	David	over Israel	forty
שָׁנָה	בְּחֶבְרֹון	מֶלֶךְ	שִׁבְעַ	שָׁנִים	
year	in Hebron	reigned	seven	years	
וּבִירוּשָׁלַם	מֶלֶךְ	שְׁלֹשִׁים	וּשְׁלֹשׁ	שָׁנִים	
and in Jerusalem	he reigned	thirty	and three	years	

And the days which David reigned over Israel were forty years¹⁰²—in Hebron he reigned seven years, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years.

I Kings 2:12

וּשְׁלֹמֹה	יָשָׁב	עַל־כִּסֵּא	דָּוִד		
And Solomon	he sat	upon throne	David		
אָבִיו	וַתֵּכֵן	מַלְכוּתוֹ	מְאֹד		
his father	it was firm	his reign	very		

Then Solomon sat upon the throne of David his father, and his reign was firmly established.

¹⁰² Forty is a significant number symbolizing completeness, and an entire generation. Even though David’s final words are about vengeance, the text clearly seeks to grant him honor in summarizing his life and reign.

CHAPTER TWO**Doubts and Limitations in Death and Legacy:****Even Great Leaders Grapple with Shortcomings**Introduction

As we saw in the previous chapter, no death or legacy transmission is free from complications. Even those who maintained power and commanded respect until the end of their lives struggled with unhealthy family dynamics and personal shortcomings. Such challenges constitute a relatively minor part of the deathbed scenes of Jacob, Aaron, and David, but they become central to the final scenes examined in this thesis chapter, those of Isaac, Moses, and Joshua. These three men are no less prominent, but they express far more awareness of the obstacles they face approaching death and attempting to influence the next generation. Isaac, Moses, and Joshua all confront the distressing reality that while so much lies beyond their control in life, this is even more true after death. There is simply no way to guarantee that their values, messages, and influence will be heeded when they are gone. Isaac, Moses, and Joshua all grapple with doubt as they face death, and struggle with the limitations imposed by mortality on ensuring their legacies.

It should be acknowledged that these stories can be upsetting to read, as we see faithful figures duped, rebuked, or worried preceding their deaths. It is sad to see someone as gentle and feeble as Isaac tricked by his family; it seems unfair that after forty years of unparalleled leadership Moses is not allowed to pass into the Promised Land; it is regrettable that no matter how many victories Joshua secured he could not accomplish his mission in its entirety. All these difficulties might generate sympathy in a reader, who views the stories as specific to these men and their ancient context. However, they may also inspire empathy because the larger truths these tales highlight lead to personal connection and identification. We may not all become blind and be duped

by our loved ones like Isaac, but we will likely experience physical decline and worry about being cared for and respected if that occurs. Nobody has ever been as great a prophet as Moses, but many fear they will die before they achieve an important goal. Thankfully, few of us will ever engage in the same amount of military conflict as Joshua, but we may worry that we will fail to protect others from harm or fall short in some way. More than anything, these stories legitimize, normalize, and make space to acknowledge that death brings a confrontation with unalterable boundaries, and that passing on a legacy is only partly in our control. The people surrounding us as we die and those who come after will have their own dynamics, needs, and shortcomings, and there is no way to be certain that the lessons we impart will speak to who they are or the situations they face. The value in studying these stories today is to internalize the message that if powerful figures in our Tanach had to contend with doubts and limitations, there is no shame in the rest of us recognizing essential weaknesses of being human and fears surrounding death.

Story Outlines

Isaac

Because Isaac is only our second patriarch, his is a story that unfolds between individuals rather than between an individual and a corporate body; there is not yet a nation for him to address, as there will be for Moses and Joshua. Having fewer followers, though, does not increase his level of control or decrease the obstacles he faces. Genesis 27:1 states, "כִּי־זָקֵן יִצְחָק וַתִּכְהֶי'ן עֵינָיו" *Isaac was old, and his eyes grew too weak to see.*" From the very outset of this deathbed scene, Isaac's limitations are front and center. This theme continues in the next verse, when Isaac himself says, "לֹא יָדַעְתִּי, יוֹם מוֹתִי" *I do not know the day of my death*" (Genesis 27:2). In fact, this deathbed scene will unfold years (and chapters) before Isaac finally passes away in Genesis 35. This is unique to Isaac because all the other figures considered so far were told by God of their

impending deaths,¹ although this uncertainty is a common experience of people today. In contrast to this ambiguity and weakness, Isaac gives his eldest son Esau clear instructions for a task that highlights his strength. Esau must use his bow and arrows to hunt game in the field and cook his father's favorite dish in order to receive a blessing. Why food is considered a prerequisite for this blessing is not clear, but the skillful activity it requires of Esau and the need for Isaac to physically revitalize himself are two possible explanations. Undoubtedly, Isaac's fragility is at the center of this opening scene and Esau's vigor is presented as a converse trait that is particularly appealing to his father.

Even though Isaac's instructions to Esau were straightforward, this story becomes twisted due to the intervention of Rebekah. Genesis 27:5 begins, "וְרִבְקָה שְׁמַעַת בְּדִבְרֵי יִצְחָק אֶל־עֵשָׂו בְּנֵוֹ And Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to Esau his son." Many commentators assume that Isaac intended to speak to Esau privately, although the text never indicates Rebekah's location, and it is entirely possible that Isaac shared his plans in her presence. David J. Zucker goes so far as to claim that Isaac only pretended to be duped to save Esau's feelings and was in fact working in tandem with his wife, given the couple's history of teamwork.² While that argument seems far-fetched, it is possible that Isaac trusted his longtime partner to accept his decision regarding passing on his legacy and blessing. Still, family dysfunction first appears in this verse, when Esau is referred to as "his son" even though Rebekah is the verse's main subject; Isaac's preference for Esau and Rebekah's distance from him are clear. This is exacerbated in the following sentence which begins, "וְרִבְקָה אָמְרָה אֶל־יַעֲקֹב בְּנֵה Then, Rebekah spoke to Jacob *her* son," (Genesis 27:6, emphasis mine) and continues with

¹ Not knowing when he might die is somewhat of a theme in Isaac's life. Most notably, he was not told in Genesis 22 that Abraham planned to sacrifice him, and then he was narrowly saved. The *Akeidah* was such a traumatizing experience that one can imagine Isaac was fearful thereafter, and perhaps he would have been suspicious of any word from God concerning his death even if it had been shared with him.

² David J. Zucker, "Cold Case: Restoring Rebekah, Intrigue in Genesis 27," *The Asbury Journal* 71, no. 2 (2016): 122.

a plan to secure the blessing for her favored child. These preferences run so deep that only once in this episode is Esau referred to as “her elder son” (Genesis 27:15), but “[n]ever does the narrator refer to Jacob as Isaac's son in 27.1-40”³ We are seeing a fractured family in which illness, marriage, and parentage do not protect against division. The same is true of the blood tie between brothers; Jacob expresses reservations about the trickery, but they appear more logistical than moral, rooted in a concern that he will be found out and then cursed. Still, in referring to his competitor as “עשוֹ אָחִי Esau my brother” (Genesis 27:11) he indicates some sense of familial connection. With the help of Rebekah’s assurances and swift action, expressed through half a dozen verbs,⁴ Jacob goes to his father prepared to steal the blessing intended for his brother.

Before moving on to the tense, sometimes excruciating scene that follows, it is worth pausing to consider the intended recipient of the blessing. Zucker’s specious argument notwithstanding, Isaac directly expresses his desire to bless Esau. While Rebekah’s special relationship with her younger son, a homebody who formed a close bond with his mother, is clear, the preference for Jacob may not be hers alone. When Rebekah sought out YHWH during her pregnancy, she was told, “שְׁנֵי גוֹיִם בְּבֶטְנֶךָ וְשְׁנֵי לְאֻמִּים מִמֶּעֶיךָ יִפְרְדוּ וְלֹאֵם מִלְאֵם יֶאֱמָץ וְרֵב יַעֲבֹד צַעִיר” Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall divide from your belly; one people shall be stronger but the greater shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). While this verse does not amount to a direct instruction to secure the blessing for Jacob, one could reasonably assume that he is God’s intended recipient and favored son. The importance of YHWH comes up in the deathbed scene, albeit in a subtle way. When Isaac gives instructions to Esau, nowhere does he mention God, but when Rebekah relays the conversation to Jacob, she claims her husband said, “הַבִּיָּאָה לִּי צִיד וְעָשָׂה-לִּי” הַבִּיָּאָה לִּי צִיד וְעָשָׂה-לִּי Bring me game and make for me a tasty dish that I may eat it and

³ Dennis Sylva, “The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch: Genesis 27.1-40,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 3 (2008): 273.

⁴ Genesis 27:14-17

bless you before YHVH" (Genesis 27:7). Jacob then uses this language when speaking with Isaac, saying, "יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִפְנֵי" YHVH your God encountered me" (Genesis 27:20). Invoking God demonstrates the centrality of the Divine to Isaac, Rebekah, and Jacob, and reinforces the idea that Jacob was the successor YHVH intended.

Dish in hand, Jacob approaches his father prepared to undergo an uncomfortable inspection. This part of the story is alternately heartbreaking and intimidating, with Isaac presenting partly as a feeble elder and partly a frightening mob boss. After he is addressed by the voice of Jacob, Isaac says, "מִי אַתָּה בְנִי" Who are you, my son?" (Genesis 27:18), then follows up the false answer by asking, "מַה־זֶּה מְהֵרָה לָמָצָא בְנִי" What is this, that you so quickly found it my son?" (Genesis 27:20). Doubting the veracity of the answers, Isaac requests, "גֹּשְׁה־נָא וְאֶמְשֹׁךְ בְּנִי הָאֵתֶּה־זֶה" "Come near, please, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are my son Esau" (Genesis 27:21). Once more, Isaac asks directly, "אַתָּה־זֶה בְנִי עֵשָׂו" Are you my son Esau?" (Genesis 27:24). Finally, Isaac requests that Jacob draw near to give him the dish and come close for a kiss before he finally declares, "רֵיחַ בְּנִי כְרִיחַ שִׂדֵּה אֲשֶׁר בְּרָכֹוּ יְהוָה" See,⁵ the smell of my son is as the smell of the field that YHVH has blessed" (Genesis 27:27). Five times Isaac works covertly or overtly to verify the identity of the son in his presence.

The final test of the kiss is quite difficult. On the one hand, it could be viewed as a sign of affection between a father and his son before bestowing a momentous blessing. It is particularly sad because Isaac becomes convinced that Jacob is Esau in this moment and even invokes YHVH in connection with his smell. The image of Jacob only receiving such affection from his otherwise cold father⁶ because he has assumed a false identity is enough to make the reader cry. On the other

⁵ The use of this verb is especially notable as Isaac is seeking to compensate for his lack of vision with scent, so saying "See, the smell..." shows he is substituting one sense for another, though this plan will not work.

⁶ Not only is Jacob never called Isaac's son in this scene by the narrator, but Isaac drops the term of endearment "my son" in verse 32 when he thinks he is no longer speaking to Esau (Sylva 273).

hand, this kiss “is not, for Isaac, a moment of tenderness, but one of discernment.”⁷ Perhaps he was trying to sniff out a rat, but upon smelling the scent of the field Isaac finally is duped. The use of a kiss to conduct this inspection evokes the kiss of death, *il bacio della morte*, a sign given by a mafioso that a member of the crime family will be killed for betrayal. Isaac may have tried to compensate for his limitations and erase his doubts, but he was ultimately unsuccessful.

After the blessing is stolen by Jacob, Esau returns home, and the trickery is revealed. The reaction is intense for both Isaac and Esau. “וַיִּחַדּוּ יִצְחָק חֲדָה גְּדֹלָה עַד־מָאֹד” Isaac trembled with a great and forceful trembling” (Genesis 27:33), while Esau “וַיִּצְעַק צְעָקָה גְּדֹלָה וּמְרָה עַד־מָאֹד” cried out with a very great and bitter outcry” (Genesis 27:34). The Hebrew *va’yitzak tza’akah* matches the intense doubling pattern of Isaac’s reaction, *va’yeherad haradah*. Three times Esau begs Isaac for a blessing using the word אבִי/my father,⁸ hoping to evoke their special connection and perhaps override this calamity. Esau is granted a secondary blessing and consoles himself by harboring a lethal grudge. Interestingly, he articulates his plan for revenge saying “וַאֲנִי הִנֵּנִי וְאֶת־יַעֲקֹב אֶחָי” and I will kill Jacob my brother” (Genesis 27:41). The word אחִי/my bother was used by Jacob in Genesis 27:11 when he expressed reservations about the trickery, and it seems that this term of endearment can be read ironically in both cases, as each brother uses it when plotting to harm the other. Then, surprisingly, despite the damage that has been done, Isaac listens to Rebekah and sends Jacob away to her family with additional blessings. It is only in this second interaction that Isaac finally invokes “בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם the blessing of Abraham” (Genesis 28:4), definitively serving as a link in the chain of transmission, passing on his father’s legacy and his own to the next generation. When Isaac finally dies years and chapters later, his sons peacefully reunite and see to his burial, but the division sown in this deathbed scene is never fully healed.

⁷ Sylva, “The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch,” 272.

⁸ Genesis 27:34 and 27:38

Moses

Being further along in the growth of the nation but early in its leadership, Moses looks to pass on lessons to both an individual and a corporate body. While Joshua proves a fitting and receptive successor, the Israelites are incredibly challenging. Despite their promises and perhaps even their best intentions, the people complain and stray time and again; despite Moses' unparalleled relationship with God, he is unable to compel them to follow the right path without deviation. That Moses is subject to the same basic limitations as other mere mortals is front and center in Deuteronomy 31. He opens this chapter by stating his age, blessings, and successes, but then says, "לא־אוּכַל עוֹד לֵצֵאת וּלְבֹא" I can no longer go out and come in" (Deuteronomy 31:2). Although the text will later claim that Moses did not lose his vigor with age,⁹ he seems to be admitting to a real limitation here, introduced explicitly by the words לא־אוּכַל and reinforced by his next statement, "וַיְהוָה אָמַר אֵלַי לֹא תַעֲבֹר אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה" and YHVH has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.'" Moses is restricted both by the natural aging process and by Divine decree. In light of this, he spends the next lines, Deuteronomy 31:3-8, verbally addressing the people as a whole and then Joshua specifically, combining successes of the past with promises for the future. This traversing of tenses, blending distant days and days to come, is fitting for the situation in which the Israelites find themselves. They are transitioning from an old leader to a new one so that they can enter a land promised to their ancestors but not yet possessed by their tribes. These threads are all woven together in Deuteronomy 31:7 וַיִּקְרָא מֹשֶׁה לַיהוֹשֻׁעַ וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלָיו לְעֵינֵי כָל־יִשְׂרָאֵל חֲזַק וְאַמֵץ כִּי "Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you will come with this people to the land which YHVH swore to their fathers to give to them, and you will

⁹ Deuteronomy 34:7

apportion it to them.’” The individual and the collective, the past and the future, and the limitations of the present leader are all contained in this verse.

The focus then shifts in Deuteronomy 31:9-13 from verbal pronouncements to the importance of a written record. With this change, Brian Britt “propose[s] that two narrative strands alternate in Deuteronomy 31–32: one on the death of Moses and commission of Joshua, and another on the recording and promulgation of texts.”¹⁰ Not only does Moses write down this תורה/Teaching, but he is concerned with its preservation. Moses entrusts the Teaching to the Levites, relatives who were trained to follow in the footsteps of his devoted brother Aaron, as well as elders he has entrusted to judge the people for many years. As “sons of Levi” and “elders of Israel” they too balance future and past. Moses seeks to ensure that generations who do not yet exist and did not have these experiences with God or hear these lessons will hear the Teaching and feel awe toward YHWH. It is notable that Moses declares these public readings will occur “במקום” בְּמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר יִבְחַר in a place which [God] shall choose” (Deuteronomy 31:11). Despite all the knowledge he has been granted, Moses does not know this aspect of the future; despite all the instructions Moses gives, God will be the One to make decisions for the people. As a final note, three times in these verses Moses says the word כל/all, referring first to the people,¹¹ then to the words of the Teaching,¹² and finally to all the days they dwell in the land.¹³ As Moses experiences just how finite he is, perhaps it is not too much to suggest he is hoping to encompass the totality of a people, time, and place that will by necessity elude his grasp.

Nowhere are Moses’ limitations and his reasons for doubt clearer than in the passages in which God states that the people will go astray and worship other gods. Despite Moses’ best efforts,

¹⁰ Brian M. Britt, “Remembering Narrative in Deuteronomy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Biblical Narrative*, ed. Danna Nolan Fewell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 9.

¹¹ כל-ישראל all Israel, Deuteronomy 31:11

¹² כל-דברי התורה all the words of this Teaching, Deuteronomy 31:12

¹³ כל הימים אשר אתם חיים על-האדמה all the days that you live upon the soil, Deuteronomy 31:13

despite appointing a capable successor and communicating in so many ways the Teaching of God, he cannot control their actions. Interestingly, God still insists that Moses write and teach a poem to the Israelites filled with warnings not to prevent the calamity but "למען תהיה לי הסיכה הזאת לעד בבני ישראל" in order that this poem may be for Me a witness against the children of Israel" (Deuteronomy 31:19). This key word, עד/witness, reappears in Deuteronomy 31:21, leading Britt to "suggest, heuristically, that the text's self reference as 'witness' (עד) and the concept of memorial reflect the overall function of the narrative in Deuteronomy 31–32."¹⁴ Moses continues on with the plans he laid out to communicate and secure his legacy, encouraging Joshua and writing down the Teaching, but the weight of God's words cannot be denied. Moses calls the people rebellious and stiff-necked, calls on heaven and earth to witness against them, and shares that he knows they will turn away from the paths which he and God command.¹⁵ That Moses continues to work and exercise leadership until the very end, spending his last moments dedicated to a mission he is unable to accomplish, is both tragic and beautiful.

Fast forwarding past the poem Moses recites, which is beyond the scope of this study, we arrive at two additional sections, Deuteronomy 32:45-52 and 34:1-12. In these verses, God provides instructions to Moses regarding his death and then Moses follows this plan and passes away. There are a few particularly interesting words and verses within these sections. In Deuteronomy 32:50, YHWH commands Moses saying, "ומָתָה And die." As Robert Alter notes, "This is a rare, and shocking, use of the verb 'to die' in the imperative."¹⁶ The verse in its entirety reads, "ומָתָה בְּהָרַ אֲשֶׁר אֶתְּהַ עֲלֶהָ" And die on the mountain which you are about to ascend there, and be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron died upon

¹⁴ Brian Britt, "Deuteronomy 31-32 As a Textual Memorial," *Biblical Interpretation* 8, no. 4 (2000): 358.

¹⁵ Deuteronomy 31:27-29

¹⁶ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2018), 735.

Hor the Mountain and was gathered to his people.” By using the phrase “gathered to your people,” which connotes an honorable death, and raising the relatively good death of Aaron, God balances harsh directness with comfort. The same can be said of God showing Moses the land but refusing to let him cross over, there is a sense of both punishment and compassion in this act.

Later, when Moses does in fact die, there is considerable ambiguity to be mined from the Hebrew. It is said that Moses died, “עַל־פִּי יְהוָה” by the mouth of YHVH” (Deuteronomy 34:5). This could be interpreted as “by the word of YHVH” meaning that Moses died at the instruction of God, or more poetically it can be read as a type of intimacy with the Divine, a kiss or an inhale that mirrors the breath of life YHVH gave to the first man. In the following verse, we read, “וַיִּקְבֹּר אֱתָנוּ בְּגִי” וַיִּצְרֹץ מֹאָב” which can be translated as both “He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab” and “He was buried in the valley in the land of Moab.”¹⁷ The text may be intentionally vague about the burial ritual surrounding Moses, but it may also indicate that God preformed this final act of *hesed* for his most loyal prophet. Finally, as Moses dies, he is honored by the text no fewer than eight times. The text says he is a servant of YHVH, dies at an old age, suffers no loss of vision or vigor, is bewailed thirty days like his beloved brother, imparted wisdom to Joshua through touch, had an unparalleled relationship with YHVH, worked wonders before Pharaoh, and instilled awe in all Israel.¹⁸ These details reflect the incredible work Moses did as leader and prophet, dedicating his life to the betterment of the Israelites by drawing them closer to God’s will. No person can be assured of posthumous success or erase all doubts and limitations, but Moses certainly lived an amazing life and died in a way that reflects the *kavod* he earned throughout his 120 years.

Joshua

¹⁷ Robert Alter argues for an interpretation using the passive voice in his translation, found in *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, 743.

¹⁸ Deuteronomy 34:5, 7-12

Before reviewing Joshua's death, let us turn to the opening chapter of the Book of Joshua, which serves as a transition from Moses to this new leader. Moses' name appears six times in the first seven verses, four times in just the first three verses; he continues to cast a long shadow over his successor and is called "עֶבֶד יְהוָה" servant of YHWH" while Joshua is referred to as "מִשְׁכָּת מֹשֶׁה" attendant of Moses" (Joshua 1:1). Yet, a shift begins to occur in Joshua 1:5, as God promises Joshua prowess and, most importantly, a lifelong connection to the Divine mirroring that of his predecessor saying, "כַּאֲשֶׁר הָיִיתִי עִם־מֹשֶׁה אֶהְיֶה עִמָּךְ" As I was with Moses, so I will be with you." Interestingly, in verses 6, 7, and 9 God repeats the instruction "חֲזַק וְאִמָּץ" be strong and courageous" that Moses had previously given to Joshua. While the words of his teacher and mentor may be ringing in his ears, God has removed Moses as the intermediary, and now encourages Joshua directly. It is only then that Joshua can transition from being the attendant of Moses to his own man and can turn to the officials of the people and וְיִצְוָם/command them,¹⁹ that key word for authority so many other figures we have studied in this thesis employ.

Jumping years, miles, and chapters ahead, we arrive in Joshua 23 at the end of Joshua's life. The man who was introduced in the shadow of Moses has grown considerably in accomplishments and confidence. Joshua 23:1-4 shifts back and forth between the power of Joshua and that of God. In the first verse, YHWH grants rest to Israel from their enemies while Joshua has grown old. In the second, Joshua addresses all of Israel, and specifically their elders, chieftains, judges, and officials, demonstrating that old age has not diminished his authority. In the third, Joshua twice credits YHWH for the military victories of the people, but right after he says, "רָא אֲנִי הִפְלֵיתִי לָכֶם אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם הַנִּשְׁאָרִים" See, / have made all these remaining nations fall to you" (Joshua 23:4, emphasis mine). These verses could be read as a reflection of a mutual partnership between Joshua and God, as an old man

¹⁹ Joshua 1:10

reliving his vitality and victories,²⁰ or an intentional blurring intended to guide the people. After all, Joshua is unique among the men studied so far in that he bequeaths a legacy onto a corporate body but not any individual. It is possible that the Israelites ascribed their military successes primarily to Joshua, and he is seeking to transfer that association onto God in the hopes that they will follow YHVH when he is gone. Just as Joshua was commissioned by God to be strong and act according to the Teaching of Moses, not deviating right or left,²¹ so he tells the people near his death "וְחִזְקֶתֶם" וְחִזְקֶתֶם You must be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Teaching of Moses, not deviating from it to the right or left" (Joshua 23:6). The collective will not prove as worthy or capable a successor as Joshua did to Moses, but there is an honest effort here to encourage their success.

It is helpful to further explore the comparisons between Joshua's farewell speech and that of Moses. Perhaps the biggest difference between the two lies in their assessment of the people and their behavior. Moses calls the people rebellious and stiff-necked, spurred to anger perhaps by his past struggles with them, but also likely by the disheartening prophecy YHVH shares that they will worship idols.²² Joshua, on the other hand, says that the Israelites have clung to YHVH to this day.²³ This more positive perspective continues in the following verses, in which Joshua reminds the people of the tremendous victories YHVH has enabled and instructs them "לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם" לְאַהֲבָה אֶת־יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם to love YHVH your God" (Joshua 23:11), rather than using the root ירא/to awe or to fear. Joshua is not told directly by God that the people will stray, so when warning them he says "כִּי אִם־שׁוּב תִּשׁוּבוּ" כִּי אִם־שׁוּב תִּשׁוּבוּ For if you indeed turn [away]" (Joshua 23:12, emphasis mine). There is some hope that they will listen and that his death will not throw the community into disarray. While Joshua does not seem to

²⁰ Recall Jacob's deathbed scene here, Genesis 48:22 when he references the land he took from the Amorites.

²¹ Joshua 1:7

²² Deuteronomy 31:27

²³ Joshua 23:8

exhibit the same anger that Moses does, he still warns Israel of the consequences of God's wrath.²⁴ Finally, just as Moses repeated the word כל/all in the final chapters of his life, Joshua does the same. והנה אנכי הולך היום בדרך כל-הארץ וידעתם בכל-לבבכם ובכל-נפשכם כי לא-נפל דבר אחד מכל הדברים "And, behold, I am going today the way of *all* the earth. You know with *all* your hearts and *all* your souls that not one word has failed of *all* the good words which YHVH your God has spoken to you" (Joshua 23:14, emphasis mine). That Joshua is going the way of all other human beings, despite his unparalleled military successes, is especially moving and demonstrates the relevance of this seemingly distant text to our times.

In the final chapter of his book and his life, Joshua makes several last efforts to ensure the obedience of the people. Once again the line between Joshua and YHVH is intentionally blurred when the first verse reads "וַיֵּאסֶף יְהוֹשֻׁעַ אֶת-כָּל-שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל" Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel" and then says they "וַיִּתְּצוּ לִפְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים" stationed themselves before God." The slipperiness between the two continues as Joshua recounts the history of the nation on behalf of God, using the first person singular from Joshua 24:2-13. The history itself is selective and strategically deployed. Unlike the final speeches of Jacob, Aaron, David, and Moses, neither God nor the human speaker reminds anyone present of their past missteps. Instead, in Joshua the people are reminded that their distant ancestors served other gods, but their forefather Abraham, the first to worship YHVH, was taken by God into the land of Canaan they now hope to hold. The Israelites can see themselves as part of an evolution from backwards idol worshipers to people who follow the one true God. This devotion comes with immense benefits, as Joshua recounts the Exodus from Egypt²⁵ and numerous military victories against powerful enemies.

²⁴ Joshua 23:16 uses the phrase "וְחָרָה אֶף-יְהוָה בְּכֶם" the wrath of YHVH will burn against you," although verses 13 and 15 also refer to Divine punishment.

²⁵ Interestingly, there is also a blurring of the people that stand before Joshua and their predecessors here because in Joshua 24:5 it states "וּבְאוֹתִי אֶתְכֶם" I brought you [all] out" and 24:6 states "וָאֵלֶּיךָ אֶת-אַבוֹתֶיךָ" I brought your forebearers out."

Joshua foregrounds the indebtedness of the people to God throughout his recitation of past events, and then shifts to their responsibilities toward YHWH moving into the future. While he does not explicitly chide the people, the sheer number of assurances Joshua seeks from them implies serious anxiety about their loyalty to God after he passes away. In Joshua 24:16-18 the people give a verbal declaration of faith, in 24:21 they affirm their service, in 24:22 they declare they are witnesses against themselves, and in 24:24 they again declare their obedience. Finally, Joshua cuts a covenant for the people, writes of these things in the Teaching of God,²⁶ and erects a stone to act as witness.²⁷ These repetitive and elaborate steps all communicate Joshua's fear that as he confronts his limitations as a leader and a person, those who come after will not follow his instruction. Joshua is given great *kavod* as he dies, sending "אִישׁ לְנַחֲלָתוֹ" each man to his holding" (Joshua 24:28), a reflection of his lifelong work of conquering the land. Like Moses, he is called "עֶבֶד יְהוָה" servant of YHWH" (Joshua 24:29), and he, Joseph's bones, and Eleazar are all buried properly in the land of Canaan thanks to his leadership and success.

Surfacing Doubts and Limitations

The remainder of this chapter will move from outlining and noting particularities in the stories of Isaac, Moses, and Joshua to highlighting their shared themes. I will examine six commonalities in total, broken into two main sections. This first section describes how Isaac, Moses, and Joshua acknowledge the doubts and limitations they feel when approaching death, and its three subsections are titled "Past Difficulties and Defeats," "Present Challenges to Authority," and "Expressing Distress." By reviewing their shortcomings, assessing the obstacles to leaving the legacies they want, and giving voice to the anger and sadness that results, these three men provide

²⁶ Note this is not called the Teaching of Moses here.

²⁷ Joshua 24:25-27

an honest and clear-eyed model for approaching death. The second section describes how these same leaders try to cope with their doubts and limitations, and its three subsections are titled “The Importance of Land,” “Invocation of Ancestors,” and “Declarations of Faith in God.” By attaching themselves and their followers to a place, a people, and an eternal force, Isaac, Moses, and Joshua demonstrate three ways a person may try to transcend the hard boundaries imposed by death. At the end of each subsection, I will draw out parallels modern readers can use should they wish to emulate or learn from these stories.

Past Difficulties and Defeats

a. Isaac

As unfortunate as the treatment of Isaac on his deathbed may be, this is not the first, nor arguably is it the most significant time in which Isaac experiences his limitations. Years earlier, Isaac’s life was threatened and nearly ended in the test known as *Akeidat Yitzhak*.²⁸ This very name, translated as The Binding of Isaac, highlights the physical restraints placed on Isaac atop Mount Moriah. Isaac’s limitations extend beyond these bonds, though; “Isaac is the least informed of the characters in the plot. God, Abraham and the reader share vital information not known by Isaac who is a passive companion on a journey which threatens his very existence.”²⁹ Isaac similarly misses out on the speech event between God and Rebekah regarding the ascendance of their younger son, and the reader has vital information about the deathbed trickery far before it is revealed to Isaac. Thus, throughout his life Isaac has limited information about profoundly impactful events. Isaac seems aware of this when he expresses doubt regarding his death, “לֹא יָדַעְתִּי יוֹם מוֹתִי” I do not know the day of my death” (Genesis 27:2). With this unusual statement, the reader is reminded that “there was

²⁸ Genesis 22:1-19

²⁹ Elizabeth Boase, “Life in the Shadows: The Role and Function of Isaac in Genesis: Synchronic and Diachronic Readings,” *Vetus Testamentum* 51, no. 3 (July 2001): 316.

another day in the past (the Aqedah) that was planned for his death which he did not know about.”³⁰ God has never communicated this information to Isaac, and anyway his mortality hung over his head from such a young age that Isaac becomes overly cautious, passing on the blessing years before he actually dies.

Additionally, certain phrases in Genesis 27 mirror those of Genesis 22, connecting the two traumatic events further. Isaac addresses Abraham as אבי/my father, and he responds הנהני בני/here I am, my son,³¹ terms of presence and affection that are particularly heartbreaking given the deception unfolding. The scenario is flipped generationally when Jacob addresses Isaac as אבי/my father, and he responds “הנהני מי אתה בני” Here I am. Who are you, my son?” (Genesis 27:18). Isaac goes on to express his doubts four more times, asking more questions and trying to discern from other senses who he is speaking with, unsure whether Jacob or Esau is approaching him for the blessing. Isaac is still deceived, this time as a parent rather than as a child. Toward the beginning and end of his life, Isaac is painfully aware of the limitations in his relationship with God and with his family. The past trauma of the *Akeidah* likely influenced the way Isaac experienced and responded to the deathbed trickery and enabled this patriarch to express doubts and confront his limitations.

b. Moses

Like Isaac, Moses is no stranger to doubt and limitations long before the day of his death. When Moses is first called upon by God to serve as prophet, he responds by foregrounding his inability to do the job saying, “כבד־פֶּה וְכבֶּד לִשׁוֹן אֲנִי, I am heavy of mouth and heavy of tongue” (Exodus 4:10). He is unsure that either the Israelites or Pharaoh will receive him as a messenger of God, despite all the wonders YHVH works to demonstrate this fact. Although he eventually overcomes these fears and leads the people out of Egypt, their constant *kvetching* and misbehaving

³⁰ Dennis Sylva, “The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch: Genesis 27.1-40,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 32, no. 3 (2008): 283.

³¹ Genesis 22:7

in the wilderness demonstrates Moses' limitations as a leader. Even though he is chosen by God and his power is reinforced in scene after scene, the people continue to challenge Moses' word and yearn to return to Egypt. Moses appears to reach the end of his rope when he says, "לֹא־אוּכַל אֲנִי, לִבְדִּי לִשְׂאת אֶת־כָּל־הָעָם הַזֶּה כִּי כבֹּד מְמִנִּי" (Numbers 11:14). The word כבֹּד reflects his earlier resistance to taking on the role of savior, and the words לֹא־אוּכַל will reappear in Deuteronomy 31:2, when Moses expresses incapacity near the end of his life.

Moses finally breaks at the Waters of Meribah, overwhelmed by the demands of the people and grief over the loss of his sister; here we see most clearly that he is only human. This moment will be referred to again at the deaths of Aaron and Moses, explaining the prohibition on them entering the Promised Land. According to a more generous reading, "The main narrative of Deuteronomy introduces Moses' death as a result of or in connection to the people's actions (1.37, 3.26, 4.21. Cf. Deut. 32.51), and says nothing about the possibility of Moses' own responsibility."³² Whether due to the burden of the people, the countless challenges to making them follow YHWH, or his own misstep, Moses demonstrates that even the greatest leaders cannot do it all. Long before he approached death and worried about investing a successor, Moses suffered defeats and learned that there were boundaries to his capacities and powers.

c. Joshua

Like his predecessor Moses, Joshua also suffers setbacks throughout his lifetime that undermine his image as an all-powerful leader and pave the way for expressions of doubt as he nears death. The task Joshua is called to fulfill is not small: entering and conquering the Promised Land and dispossessing the existing nations to secure holdings for the Israelites. With God on his

³² Gili Kugler, "Moses died and the people moved on: A hidden narrative in Deuteronomy," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 43, no. 2 (2019): 192.

side, Joshua and his small army prove to be shockingly successful, demonstrating that Divine favor matters more than troop size or weaponry. Joshua recalls this remarkable fact when he summarizes the people's military experience at the end of his life saying, "אִישׁ־אַחַד מֵכֶם יִרְדֹּף־אֶלֶף כִּי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם" One man from you pursues a thousand, for YHVH your God does battle for you" (Joshua 23:10). Yet, this rosy reminiscence papers over past defeats. In the battle of Ai, the Israelite force was routed, thirty-six men were killed, and the rest were deeply affected.³³ Joshua's subsequent reaction and mourning "mirrors the anguish of the local kings who have anxiously watched the Israelites enter the land."³⁴ The line between Israel and its enemies, between victory and defeat, is far more porous than previously thought, and Joshua's actions seem to acknowledge this reality.

Later, amid a list of astounding military successes, it is reported, "לֹא־נֹתַר עֲנָקִים בְּאֶרֶץ בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל לִקְ בְּעֵזָה דָּגַת וּבְאַשְׁדּוֹד נִשְׁאָרוּ" There remained no Anakites in the land of the children of Israel; only in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod did they remain" (Joshua 11:22). The text seems initially resistant and then resigned to admit that this feared outsider continues to live inside some of the Israelite holdings, or at the very least at their borders. Leveen notes, "The powerful presence of the Anakites in territory later held by Joshua functions within the narrative as a space of resistance to the Israelites that calls attention to their inability to conquer the Promised Land in its entirety."³⁵ Thus, Joshua knew for years before his death that he was unable to accomplish his mission fully, so an enemy remains that threatens to unravel his instruction and legacy.

d. Contemporary Implications

The difficulties that Isaac, Moses, and Joshua endure throughout their lives prepare them to face the limitations imposed by death, and these defeats also make them more relatable to modern

³³ Joshua 7:5

³⁴ Adriane Leveen, *Biblical Narratives of Israelites and their Neighbors* (London: Routledge, 2018), 55.

³⁵ Leveen, *Biblical Narratives*, 65-6.

readers. Like Isaac, many people experience minor or major trauma at the hands of their relatives. Such experiences shape the ways we form attachments and the extent to which we trust other people; we may become guarded around family if they have mistreated us, and that affects the way we approach death and legacy. If a parent withheld their love and affection, we may decide not to turn to them in illness for comfort; if a sibling acted as a bully for years, they may not be the right person to entrust as executor of our will. And while the abuses of physical violence and deception Isaac suffered in the Akeidah and his deathbed scene are hopefully not common to readers, related feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty are essential parts of the human experience that shape the way we plan for the end of life. Acknowledging these hard emotions and properly assessing who in our lives can be relied upon as we face mortality can help us minimize doubts and anxieties at this trying stage of life.

The shortcomings that Moses and Joshua experienced in life demonstrate that no matter how strong and capable a person may be, nobody is able to exert total control over the world around them or the people they care about. This means that there is simply no way to remove all obstacles for those we love or guarantee that they will heed our advice when they encounter challenges. Many of us will approach death feeling as though there is some mission we have not accomplished, some end we have not secured. The Tanach normalizes this feeling, because if even the greatest leaders of our people experienced such shortcomings, who are we to hold ourselves to such high expectations? But even more than that, our sacred text shows that it is natural to express anger and anxiety, to rail against our limitations, to wish that circumstances were different. These are steps Moses and Joshua took as they came to terms with the boundaries imposed by mortality, and we are entitled to them as well. Then, hopefully, we can face our limitations, make some measure of peace with them, and articulate out hopes that the next generation carry on our legacy.

Present Challenges to Authority

a. Isaac

Causes for doubt do not just plague these three men early in their lives, but there are people present as they approach death who seriously challenge their authority. For Isaac, those people are his younger son Jacob and his wife Rebekah. In more benign ways, Rebekah has exercised greater leadership than her husband from the beginning of their relationship. She consents to their marriage and makes a trip to a new land that resembles the journey of Abraham,³⁶ while Isaac is the only patriarch not involved in making his own match.³⁷ Although Isaac does show initiative when he prays for Rebekah to become pregnant, the “promise by God of continuity into the next generation is made, not to Isaac as would be expected, but to Rebekah (v. 23). She is presented as being stronger than Isaac, entrusted with a revelation from God.”³⁸ This is a couple that is, on the one hand, uniquely attached to each other; Isaac does not consider taking a second wife when Rebekah is barren, as his father and son do,³⁹ and he is also unable to maintain physical separation from Rebekah when they pretend to be siblings in Gerar. At the same time, they seem to work so well as a couple because she is the yin to his yang, active where he is passive. The route to this final scene between husband and wife, when he lies in bed while she rushes around undermining his power, was paved years in advance. Perhaps that is why, after a severe initial reaction, he heeds Rebekah’s concerns and acts according to her wishes⁴⁰ even after she facilitates the theft of the blessing.

b. Moses

³⁶ Genesis 24:58, her אֵלָךְ can be read in connection with God’s command to Abraham in Genesis 12:1 לְךָ־אֵלָךְ

³⁷ Genesis 11:29 וַיֵּלֶךְ אַבְרָם וְנָחֹר לָהֶם נָשִׁים and Genesis 29, Abraham and Jacob both show initiative in taking wives

³⁸ Boase, “Life in the Shadows,” 318.

³⁹ Zucker, “Cold Case,” 119.

⁴⁰ Zucker, “Cold Case,” 120.

Moses is entirely clear-eyed regarding those he addresses at the end of his life, and, frustratingly, his addressees are also the biggest obstacle to his authority. In the past, those who challenged Moses were quite violently eliminated by God, and the power of the prophet was affirmed. The masses who clamored for quail and misremembered Egypt were struck down by a plague in Numbers 11. Korah, Datan, and Abiram rebelled in Numbers 16, and they and their followers were killed by Divine sinkhole and fire. But wiping out every Israelite who ever strayed would leave nobody to carry on and enter the Promised Land, so in Deuteronomy Moses must both rebuke and reinforce his audience. Near the beginning of his address to the people Moses declares, “איִכֶּה אֲשָׂא לְבַדִּי טָרְחָכֶם וּמִשְׁאַחֲכֶם וְרִיבֵכֶם” How can I bear alone the burden of you, and your load and your quarreling!” (Deuteronomy 1:12). Toward the end of his speech, he is equally frustrated with the people, “הִנֵּה בְּעוֹדִי חַי עִמָּכֶם הַיּוֹם מִמָּרִים הַיְּתֵם עִם־יְהוָה” Behold, as I am still living with you today you rebel against YHVH” (Deuteronomy 31:27). Moses knows the shortcomings of the people, and he is explicitly told by God that the Israelites will go astray. This revelation makes Deuteronomy “unlike the modern literary...plot, in which uncertainty guides a suspenseful desire to discover what will happen, [because] the outcome here is known.”⁴¹ Even still, Moses keeps speaking to the people, though he knows this is of limited utility. There is a twisted tension because the Israelites are both his greatest hurdle and his only possibility for success, and no matter how clearly Moses understands this paradox he is unable to give up and stop guiding his wayward followers.

c. Joshua

Joshua also expresses some doubts as to the loyalty of the Israelites after he is gone, but the most pressing challenge to his authority comes from foreign nations. There are many present threats, whether the laundry list of cities and kings not conquered in Joshua 13:2-4,⁴² or the nations

⁴¹ Britt, “Remembering Narrative,” 3.

⁴² Leveen, *Biblical Narratives*, 62.

the Israelites failed to dispossess in the settlements of the Reubenites, Gadites and half-tribe of Manasseh across the river.⁴³ Joshua is certain that these peoples will undermine both the Israelites' devotion to God and the territorial victories he accumulated. He warns specifically of getting too close to them, saying,

כִּי אִם-שׁוּבוּ תִשׁוּבוּ וּדְבַקְתֶּם בְּיִתְרֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה הַנִּשְׁאָרִים הָאֵלֶּה אִתְּכֶם וְהִתְחַנְנְתֶּם בָּהֶם וּבְאֵתָם בָּהֶם וְהֵם בָּכֶם יִדְּעוּ כִּי לֹא יוֹסִיף יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם לְהוֹרִישׁ אֶת-הַגּוֹיִם הָאֵלֶּה מִלְּפָנֵיכֶם וְהָיוּ לְכֶם לִפְחַ וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ וּלְשֹׁטֵט בְּצַדִּיקְכֶם וּלְצַנְנִים בְּעֵינֵיכֶם עַד-אֲבֹדְכֶם מֵעַל הָאֲדָמָה הַטּוֹבָה הַזֹּאת אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לְכֶם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם

For if you indeed turn and cling to the remnant of those nations, those that remain among you, and intermarry with them, that you come among them and they among you, you must surely know that YHVH will no longer dispossess these nations before you; they will become a trap and a snare for you, a scourge against your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good soil that YHVH your God has given you.” (Joshua 23:12-13)

In this explicit warning, as elsewhere in the book of Joshua, “[t]he fantasies of power and jubilant victories against easily defeated strangers confront the realities of life as lived in a land shared with others.”⁴⁴ Joshua, an unmatched commander, must focus on the undefeated enemies that remain as he prepares to die.

d. Contemporary Implications

While the obstacles that an aging or dying person faces today are not likely to resemble those of Isaac, Moses, or Joshua exactly, there are still important parallels. Like in the case of Isaac, it is possible that the people who are least likely to listen to us and respect our end-of-life wishes are family members. This may be rooted in love, like in the case of a spouse or child who refuses to engage in a conversation about medical interventions or wills because they cannot imagine their partner or parent dying. It could also happen because longstanding dynamics get in the way of truly listening. The earlier and more often we raise these topics, the more likely this pattern can change or, if that fails, the more time a person has to find a proper executor.

⁴³ Leveen, *Biblical Narratives*, 63

⁴⁴ Leveen, *Biblical Narratives*, 63.

Like Moses, we may know with confidence that no matter what we say aloud or write down, our instructions will not be followed. More likely, we will have suspicions that our advice and life lessons could be inapplicable to or not fully understood by those who follow. But like Moses, we can pass on the core messages anyway, either because we simply cannot imagine doing anything less, or because we hope that at some point many years down the line our words will speak to someone's needs. Finally, while we should not practice the xenophobia that informs Joshua's last speech, we can reasonably worry about the longevity of the communities and causes in which we are invested. Nobody has ever accumulated enough authority to ensure that the groups they love will always endure, but we can try our best to instill this passion in others.

Expressing Distress

a. Isaac

Akeidat Yitzhak has been referred to in this thesis chapter as a traumatizing event, but interestingly the text does not record any overt reaction from Isaac regarding this near-death experience. True, Abraham appears to return to his servants alone, and commentators note that Isaac's absence indicates that an unbreachable rift opened between father and son. When he discovers that he blessed Jacob instead of Esau, the text surprisingly records a very apparent and visceral reaction from Isaac. "וַיִּחַרְדּוּ יִצְחָק וְגָדְלָה עִדּוּמָּאד" Isaac trembled with a great and forceful trembling" (Genesis 27:33). This unprecedented response to betrayal is seen by Dennis Sylva as an "indicator of how important this blessing is for Isaac...The blessing is a defining event that will convey what is essential about Isaac's life."⁴⁵ I would suggest that Isaac's strong reaction to the stealing of the blessing reflects frustration as he confronts several key limitations. He experiences physical shortcomings, as his failing eyesight and general weakness set up a scenario in which others

⁴⁵ Sylva, "The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch," 268.

could resort to trickery. More significantly, the limited ways in which Isaac experienced and gave love to his sons finally comes back to haunt him. While primogeniture can only be granted to one son, there was no reason to favor Esau and separate from Jacob so fully.⁴⁶ Even Esau experienced a restricted and conditional form of love from his father; “That Isaac is a man of severely limited affections is shown by the lengths to which Esau goes in order to obtain a blessing from him...”⁴⁷ When the blessing is granted to Jacob posing as Esau, it is quite restrained; “This is the most limited blessing in all of NP, and it is mediated by the most pinched of the patriarchs.”⁴⁸ One cannot assume to know exactly what Isaac was feeling as he trembled in his bed, but his limited vision and affection created a situation that shook him to his core.

b. Moses

Early in Deuteronomy, Moses expresses distress over his inability to enter the Promised Land. He recounts to the people how he asked God to please be allowed to cross over and see⁴⁹ the other side of the Jordan, but God’s response was clear and harsh. וַיַּעֲבֹר יְהוָה בִּי לְמַעַן אֶלְלֹא שָׁמַעַי. “YHWH was angry with/passed over⁵⁰ me on account of you all and would not listen to me; YHWH said to me ‘It is too much for you. Never again speak to Me about this matter!’” (Deuteronomy 3:26). Moses knew his fate had been decided, and he had even been present when Aaron died for their joint misstep and was denied entry into the land. Still, emotions ran high in this moment and the reader can feel the distress behind Moses’ request, the desperation that led him to risk Divine wrath. The root עבר features prominently in that

⁴⁶ Sylva points out “We read that he loves Esau, but never that he loves Jacob.” Sylva, “The Blessing,” 270.

⁴⁷ Sylva, “The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch,” 271.

⁴⁸ Sylva, “The Blessing of a Wounded Patriarch,” 273.

⁴⁹ Note that God does not allow him to cross over *and* see, but does allow him simply to see from afar, a small comfort, although the scene is still heartbreaking.

⁵⁰ The rare *hitpael* form of this verb is often translated as “YHWH was angry with me” (Kugler 198), but it could also be read as “YHWH passed over me” meaning Moses felt invisible, small, and understood he had lost his grip on power and needed to appoint a successor.

verse, and it reappears in the final chapters of Deuteronomy as Moses recalls his sentence, commissions Joshua, and tells the Israelites of their future tasks. It is possible to read Moses' last chapters, which he begins by recalling in less vivid detail YHWH's prohibition on him crossing over into the land, as laced with the sadness and disappointment of this earlier episode. Moses expresses a mixture of anger and mistrust toward the people, but this may be masking the fear and sadness he feels as he confronts limitations placed on him by God and his own human frailty.

c. Joshua

Finally, one can detect distress in Joshua's last speech to the people as he too confronts all that lies beyond his control. Some signs of Joshua's upset are clear, such as the number of times he warns the Israelites of the consequences of forsaking God. In chapter 23, half of the 16 verses are dedicated to these warnings. In verses 6-8 Joshua admonishes the people to follow in the ways of YHWH, verse 11 stands as another warning, and then in verses 12-16 the punishments for deviation are enumerated in increasingly alarming terms. One can sense the anxiety building in Joshua as he speaks. While a smaller percentage of chapter 24 is taken up by these exhortations, they are still present and urgent, and one can sense Joshua's nerves fraying as he requires multiple promises from the Israelites and establishes concrete reminders of the covenant. Joshua 24:15 may be read as a subtler indication of the leader's agitation. He appears to be goading the people when he says,

וְאִם רָע בְּעֵינֵיכֶם לַעֲבֹד אֶת־יְהוָה בַּחֲלוֹ לָכֶם הַיּוֹם אֶת־מִי תַעֲבֹדוּן אִם אֶת־אֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־עַבְדוּ
הַנְּהָר וְאִם אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי הָאֱמֹרִי אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם יֹשְׁבִים בָּאָרֶץ וְאִנֹּכִי וּבֵיתִי [מַעֲבָר] (בעבר) אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר
נַעֲבַד אֶת־יְהוָה

And if it is evil in your eyes to serve YHWH, choose today whom you would serve, if it be the gods that your forebearers served beyond the river or if it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but I and my house will serve YHWH."

This verse reads as quite passive-aggressive, a rare tone for the Tanach that seems to communicate rising concern in Joshua. For a man whose career was defined by resolute leadership and issuing straightforward orders, these final chapters show Joshua experiencing distress as his mortality and unfinished mission come into focus.

d. Contemporary Implications

The range of expressions of distress displayed by Isaac, Moses, and Joshua map well onto the experiences of modern readers. Whether facing acute illness or impending death, or contemplating the inevitability of mortality, facing the limits of the human experience is often distressing. Some people react physically, as Isaac did, and their emotions come out in the form of shaking, crying, or heavy breathing. They may also become aware of the shortcomings that were at least partially within their control, such as times that they withheld love or attention instead of giving more generously of themselves. Fortunately, there may be opportunities to address those self-imposed limitations if they are confronted early enough and with intention. Other people resonate more with the experience of Moses, wishing to escape fate. In fact, bargaining was identified decades ago by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross as an essential stage of the grieving process.⁵¹ It is also common for fear and sadness to come out sideways and be masked with anger, as Moses appears to do when addressing the people. And I personally resonate with the rising tension and anxiety Joshua feels, as first wrapping my head around the concept of death as a child caused intense panic. All of these reactions are normal, and to see such powerful men express these difficult emotions can help a reader feel seen and understood by our tradition.

Coping with Doubts and Limitations

After exploring the ways in which Isaac, Moses, and Joshua experienced their doubts and limitations, it is now time to examine the coping strategies they used in response. I would not go so far as to say that these reactions were intentionally chosen to soothe their feelings or bolster their confidence. Still, finding similarities among all three figures indicates some level of efficacy for these coping mechanisms, which can offer guidance to contemporary readers.

⁵¹ Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1969).

The Importance of Land

a. Isaac

Land constitutes a recurring theme in Isaac's deathbed scene. Isaac finally drops his lengthy interrogation of Jacob-posing-as-Esau when he draws near enough for Isaac to declare, "ראה כיח בְּנִי", "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of the field that YHWH has blessed" (Genesis 27:27). Ironically, it is the scent of the field that prevents Isaac from seeing the truth. Additionally, this is the first time that Isaac refers to God, and the only time he says the tetragrammaton in this scene. Isaac then blesses Jacob with "שְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ וְכֶבֶד דָּגָן וְתִירָשׁ" the fat of the earth, and abundance of grain and fresh wine" (Genesis 27:28). Although next he says that Jacob will rule over his brothers, Sylva points out "Jacob is never the lord of Esau, and his brother is never his servant. Jacob never lords it over other peoples. When he goes to a foreign land, he serves his uncle Laban for twenty years...some of Isaac's blessings do not pan out in the narrative,"⁵² yet the blessings regarding riches from the earth do come true and allow Jacob to become a skilled and wealthy shepherd. So important is the land that even when Isaac can only grant the real Esau a limited blessing, it begins with the words, "הִנֵּה מִשְׁמֵנִי הָאָרֶץ יְהוָה מְוֹשְׁבָךְ", "Behold, from the fat of the earth shall be your dwelling place" (Genesis 27:39). Isaac granting each of his sons this blessing indicates that the importance of the land extends far beyond any specific borders⁵³ and is in fact a stand-in for sustenance. Up until this point, Isaac as a father had ensured the material wellbeing of his family, but as he faces death, he desperately wants to ensure that each child has what he needs to continue on and support his own household. One son may become more powerful than the other, but Isaac seeks to ensure that both have what they need to survive in his absence.

⁵² Sylva, "The Blessing," 275-6.

⁵³ It is especially notable that Isaac does not focus on granting a specific parcel of land to Jacob-posing-as-Esau because Isaac is the only patriarch who is spared a journey away from the land in Genesis 26:2, Sylva 282.

b. Moses

Land features prominently in Moses' farewell addresses as well, although it fulfills a somewhat different function. For Moses personally, the land comes to represent his limitations, all that he will not be able to experience due to his missteps. He speaks continually of the land to which the Israelites will cross over, the land Joshua will lead them to conquer, the land God promised that flows with milk and honey. Britt emphasizes this focus on the Promised Land by listing "Moses's repeated statements about the territories Israel is about to enter (2:4; 3:21; 4:5, 14; 6:1; 7:1; 9:1; 11:10; 12:2, 29; 18:14; 23:20)."⁵⁴ As difficult as it is for Moses never to step foot on that soil, YHWH grants him a concession in the verse immediately preceding his death. "וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלָיו זֶה הָאָרֶץ" (YHWH said to him, 'This is the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying "To your seed I shall give it." I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over there'" (Deuteronomy 34:4). Yes, the restriction remains in place, but the gift of seeing the land allows Moses to know concretely that he has done his job; he has given his people shelter.

c. Joshua

As we have already seen, Joshua is extremely focused on land throughout his lifetime and at the time of his death. His mission has been to conquer and settle the land. As Leveen notes, twice in the opening scene of the Book of Joshua, in Joshua 1:2 and 6, God tells Joshua to enter the land being given to the Israelites. In these verses, “God speaks in the imperative, bringing a note of urgency to the command. The land must be divided among the Israelites and settled as quickly as possible lest the new generation loses heart.”⁵⁵ That same battle for the hearts⁵⁶ of the Israelites will need to continue after Joshua dies precisely because outside nations remain in the land.

⁵⁴ Britt, "Remembering Narrative," 9.

⁵⁵ Leveen, *Biblical Narratives*, 45.

⁵⁶ See Joshua 23:11 and 23:14 for references to love and the hearts of the people.

Additionally, the land serves as a type of disciplinarian in place of Joshua. In Joshua 23:13, 15 and 16 Joshua refers to *הטובה האדמה*/the good soil and *הטובה הארץ*/the good earth which God has granted, but which can become the land of their destruction if the Israelites go astray. Finally, references to the land at the very end of Joshua's life highlight his accomplishments as a leader. Right before his death, Joshua sends the people back to their holdings,⁵⁷ showing that the mission communicated in chapter 1 has been largely fulfilled. Then, the text provides place names for the burial sites of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar. With references to the land, Joshua's success is reinforced as this chapter in his book, his life, and the life of the nation comes to a close.

d. Contemporary Implications

Like Moses and Joshua, some people who put their affairs in order before death will bequeath land onto the next generation. This could come in the form of a house and the plot it occupies, or a larger or less developed tract. The hope may be for one's children or other recipients to live on the land, or they may be expected to sell the property and divide the profits. More often, an inheritance for the next generation is focused less on land specifically and more on providing something of value to lessen financial concerns for those we love. In this way, many of us will imitate Isaac's focus on survival and sustenance. Like Moses and Joshua, we review what we have accomplished and accumulated as we near the end of our days, taking pride in our hard-earned victories and acknowledging losses. While the inheritances we grant will not physically reject our successors like the Promised Land, we certainly hope that they will be used in ways that align with our values and teachings. Material inheritances today can play a similar role to land in the Tanach, increasing the chances that the next generation will be cared for and continue to think of us after we are gone.

⁵⁷ Joshua 24:28

Invocation of Ancestors

a. Isaac

As our second patriarch, Isaac dies many generations before his family line rises to the prominence that God promised. Still, Isaac is aware of the special relationship between Abraham and God, and he too has experienced Divine communication and blessing in his life. Thus, when Isaac sends Jacob away, he does so with a second blessing in which he invokes his father saying, וְאֵל שַׁדַּי יְבַכֶּרְךָ וַיַּפְרֹךְ וַיִּרְבֶּךָ וְהָיִיתָ לְקָהָל עַמִּים. וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ אֶת־בְּרִכַּת אַבְרָהָם לֵךְ וּלְזָרְעֲךָ אֶתְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּךְ אֶת־ (Gen 28:3-4). May El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful, that you may become a great assembly of peoples. May He give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring together, that you may possess the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham” (Genesis 28:3-4). Isaac says the name of God first used in Genesis 17:1, when Abraham and Sarah’s names changed, and they were told the covenant would be maintained with Isaac. By harkening back to this moment, Isaac recalls that the world preceded him and will continue long after he dies. By naming his father twice, Isaac may be drawing comfort as he nears his own death, recalling the honor granted to Abraham when he died. In fact, Isaac is buried in the same place as his parents⁵⁸ and his death brings together his two estranged sons, just as he and Ishmael reunited to bury Abraham.⁵⁹ The line of ancestors may not be long at this point in the story of our people, but already the importance of linking oneself to a chain of tradition brings comfort and reassurance in the face of death.

b. Moses

The final words God spoke to Moses were discussed in the section above as a concession to this faithful servant before death. Here, we will focus not on Moses seeing the land but on God

⁵⁸ Genesis 35:27

⁵⁹ Genesis 25:9

invoking the patriarchs at that moment. Again, YHWH says, "זֹאת הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי לְאַבְרָהָם לְיִצְחָק" (Deuteronomy 34:4). This is the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'To your seed I shall give it' (Deuteronomy 34:4). God could have called it the "Promised Land" or the "land flowing with milk and honey," but saying the names of the patriarchs may bring comfort to Moses. Just as these three men are revered as the founders of the Israelite people, Moses shall be revered as its greatest leader. Our patriarchs were buried with honor, remembered by their descendants, and remained beloved by God long after their deaths, and the same will be true for Moses. Then, by emphasizing that Moses brought the people to a land promised long ago, God reminds him that he is a crucial link in a chain extending back hundreds of years. Moses may not be able to see far back into the past or ahead to the future, but God always knew this covenant would be fulfilled. By invoking these ancestors, God grants Moses a beautiful moment of connection and closure even as he confronts his end.

c. Joshua

Of all three figures examined in this chapter, Joshua invokes the greatest number of ancestors in his final address. In one way, Joshua acts for the sake of the Israelites listening when he outlines this extensive history. He begins with Terah and his idol worship on the other side of the river, continues to Abraham and his entry into Canaan, and traces a path in and out of the land as circumstances arose over the years. Joshua is invoking these experiences to remind the people that the land they now possess was promised generations ago, but also that their wellbeing is contingent on remaining faithful to God. He then shifts to more recent reference points, like the exodus of his listeners' grandparents and parents from Egypt. Both the distant and recent past have the power to influence the people's actions. In another way, though, Joshua may be recounting this history and these past leaders to comfort himself as he faces death. The three patriarchs are remembered with reverence, and Moses and Aaron were highly regarded leaders. Joshua may hope to join this

pantheon of great men, to receive the honor they did after death, and to exert some measure of influence on the people after he is gone.

d. Contemporary Implications

Modern readers can find wisdom in the way all three of the figures considered in this thesis chapter invoke our shared ancestors. Isaac invoking his father Abraham is highly relatable, because most people today do not know the names and stories of their family members many generations in the past; it is sufficient to recall even just one generation that existed before us and recount their stories that unfolded before we were born to remember that we are part of something larger. Isaac also demonstrates that one's relationship with their parents need not be perfect to draw comfort from their memory. In fact, their foibles can give us additional assurance that just as they were honored after death despite their imperfections, we too will be cared for despite our shortcomings. Turning to Moses, while we are not likely to receive direct communication from God today, we can still benefit from the perspective that God gifted this faithful servant. We too are part of a people that stretches back farther than we can imagine, and our very existence can be seen as the dream of our great- or great-great-grandparents fulfilled. This does not eliminate the sadness of Moses' death, and it will not do so for us, but it may bring some consolation to know that whatever we achieve in life is one proud part of a much longer story. Finally, considering Joshua, his recollection of both distant and recent predecessors creates a productive tension. On the one hand, we are reminded how small our lifespan is in the grand scheme of things. On the other hand, those who came immediately before us mean so much to us, playing the roles of parents, mentors, and friends. Joshua's example allows us to become aware of both our smallness and our significance all at the same time, a dual perspective that is fruitful when one contemplates death and legacy.

Declarations of Faith in God

a. Isaac

While invoking one's ancestors can bring comfort because it reminds a dying person that they are part of something larger than themselves, faith in God may bring even more consolation. After all, God stands as an omniscient entity in contrast to human doubt, a limitless Being compared to mortal human beings. Thus, even though Isaac experienced trauma at the instigation of God, his relationship with the Divine is still central as he approaches death. As stated in the story outline, Isaac does not mention God when he first tells Esau about the blessing. It is Rebekah who inserts this language in her partially accurate retelling of the conversation to Jacob. When Isaac asks how his dish has been prepared so quickly, Jacob responds, "כִּי הִקְרָה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לִפְנֵי" Because YHVH your God encountered me" (Genesis 27:20). Here, it is not the God of Abraham; instead the tetragrammaton is connected with Isaac alone, a sign of respect and recognition from Jacob of his father's faith. Isaac is only convinced he is speaking to Esau when he smells on his son's clothing "שִׂדֵּה אֲשֶׁר בְּרָכּוֹ יְהוָה" the field that YHVH has blessed" (Genesis 20:28). Then, he immediately invokes *Elohim* as the grantor of the blessings. Similarly, Isaac frames the second blessing of Jacob by invoking God by the name *El Shaddai*. God is the source of blessing, and God will be the one to see to the continuation of the family line and their wellbeing long after Isaac is gone.

b. Moses

The relationship between Moses and God is unparalleled in its intimacy and strength, and Moses upholds his faith in God to the very end. When commissioning Joshua, Moses says, "וַיְהוָה הוּא" וַיְהוָה הוּא הַהֹלֵךְ לְפָנֶיךָ הוּא יְהוָה עִמָּךְ לֹא יִרְפֶּךָ וְלֹא יַעֲזֹבְךָ לֹא תִירָא וְלֹא תִחַת" And YHVH, He is Who walks before you, He will be with you and will not forsake or abandon you; you shall not fear and you shall not be dismayed" (Deuteronomy 31:8). Moses will no longer be able to advise his mentee, but God's omnipresence can help to allay Joshua's fears, and perhaps Moses' too. Interestingly, when God later says that the people will go astray and worship idols, Moses both trusts in God's prediction and cannot stop himself from trying to communicate the importance of faith in the one true God to the

Israelites. If last words are seen as reflecting the essence of a person's life and mission, clearly faith in YHWH lies at Moses' core. The centrality of this relationship is communicated in the verse that reports Moses' death, "וַיָּמָת שָׁם מֹשֶׁה עֶבֶד־יְהוָה בְּאֶרֶץ מוֹאָב עַל־פִּי יְהוָה" Moses, servant of YHWH, died there in the land of Moab, by the mouth of YHWH" (Deuteronomy 34:5). Here the tetragrammaton appears twice in just ten words, first linked to the very identity of Moses and then in a phrase that acknowledges their intimate relationship.

c. Joshua

While Joshua may not speak with God פנים אל פנים/face to face, their bond is incredibly strong throughout his life. As previously discussed, Joshua spends much of his farewell address referring to a God who acts in history, from Abraham to the Exodus to the conquering of cities in the land. God is also an arbiter of reward and punishment, blessing the people who follow the right path and punishing those who stray. Joshua has complete faith in God's presence and knowledge, strength and fairness. And in opposition to other gods of the Ancient Near East, YHWH will never diminish in power. Thus, Joshua is urging the people to obey the only force in the world that is unbounded and eternal, as well as declaring his own abiding faith in that very entity.

d. Contemporary Implications

Not every person today believes in God, and those who do are never talking about the exact same conception of the Divine. Beyond a certain age, most people agree on what God is not: an old man with a white beard sitting on a throne in the sky. But what God is, how God is present in our world, is open to as many interpretations as there are people. Many of us think that God is unimaginably large, exceeding the boundaries of our understanding. A relationship with the Divine can help a person approach confusing and frightening existential quandaries. Feeling attached to something larger than ourselves can help us cope with our limitations. Like Isaac, we may pray that God will look after our loved ones when we are gone. Like Moses, we can make God central to our

identities as we approach death, elevating a closeness with the Divine that can otherwise get clouded by the humdrum of daily life. Or like Joshua, we may believe that God will somehow mete out justice and urge others to follow a religious or moral path. Aging and dying are certainly not times to force belief on a person simply to allay their fears, but a genuine contemplation of the forces beyond our reach may increase comfort with all that is unknowable.

Conclusion

In *halacha*, there is a distinction between practices sanctioned *l'chatchila*, "from the outset," and those permitted *b'dei'avad*, "after the fact." While we strive for the ideal behavior and set of circumstances, there is an understanding that life can play out in unexpected and imperfect ways. This concept can be applied to the first two chapters of this thesis; the deaths of Jacob, Aaron, and David get as close as possible to the *l'chatchila* desirable standard, while those of Isaac, Moses, and Joshua unfold under flawed conditions. The first chapter aimed at encouraging modern readers to strive toward a good death and intentional legacy as much as possible, showing how powerful it can be to discern and communicate our wishes to those we love. This second chapter strives to normalize doubts and limitations, showing that even the most powerful among us faced challenges as they approached death and passed on their legacies. There must be space to grapple with the sadness, frustration, and anxiety that comes from confronting the barriers imposed on us by our mortality. Yet there are also several ways we can try to transcend those barriers, attaching ourselves and our loved ones to places, people, and forms of faith that help instill cherished values and promote a sense of continuity. Even if we do everything in our power to prepare for the end of life and craft a meaningful legacy, doubts will still arise because we are human, and the people we love and trust to carry on our memories are human too, and we are all flawed. The hope is not to eliminate all our shortcomings, but to find ways to navigate them and arrive at a sense of peace.

Translation: Isaac's Death
Genesis 27:1-28:9, Genesis 35:27-29

Genesis 27:1

מֵרָאָת	עֵינָיו	וַתֵּלֶךְ	יִצְחָק	כִּי־זָקֵן	וַיְהִי
from seeing	his eyes	grew weak	Isaac	for old	And it was
וַיֹּאמֶר	הַגָּדֹל	בְּנוֹ	אֶת־עֵשָׂו	וַיִּקְרָא	
he said	the greater	his son	(to) Esau	he called	
הִנְנִי	אֵלָיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	בְּנִי	אֵלָיו	
here I am	to him	he said	my son	to him	

And it happened when Isaac was old, and his eyes grew too weak to see, that he called to Esau his elder son and said to him, “My son.” He said, “*Hineini*, here I am.”

Genesis 27:2

מוֹתִי	יּוֹם	יָדַעְתִּי	לֹא	זָקַנְתִּי	הִנֵּה־נָא	וַיֹּאמֶר
my death	day	I knew	no	I grew old	behold please	He said

He said, “Behold, please, I have grown old, and I do not know the day of my death.

Genesis 27:3

וְקִשְׁתְּךָ	תֵּלִיךָ	כְּלִיךָ	שֹׂא־נָא	וְעַתָּה	
and your bow	your quivers	your utensils	bear up please	And now	
[צִיד] (צידה)	לִי	וְצוּדָה	הַשָּׂדֶה	וְצֵא	
game	to me	and hunt	the field	and go out	

“So now, please take up your gear, your quivers and your bow, and go out to the field and hunt me some game.

Genesis 27:4

לִי	וְהָבִיָּאָה	אֶהְבֵּתִי	כְּאֲשֶׁר	מִטְעָמִים	וַעֲשֵׂה־לִּי
to me	bring it	I loved	as	tasty food	Make for me
אֲמוֹת	בְּטָרֶם	נַפְשִׁי	תְּבָרַכְךָ	בְּעִבּוֹר	וְאָכְלָה
I will die	before	my soul/self	she will bless you	for the sake of	I will eat it

“Then, make me a tasty dish such as I love and bring it to me that I may eat it, so that my innermost self may bless you before I die.”

Genesis 27:5

בְּנוֹ	אֶל־עֵשָׂו	יִצְחָק	בְּדִבָּר	שָׁמְעָת	וּרְבֵקָה
his son	to Esau	Isaac	in he spoke	she listened	And Rebekah
לְהָבִיא	צִיד	לְצוּד	הַשָּׂדֶה	עָשָׂו	וַיֵּלֶךְ
to bring in	game	to hunt	the field	Esau	he went

And Rebekah was listening as Isaac spoke to Esau his son;⁶⁰ and Esau went to the field to hunt game to bring back.

Genesis 27:6

וְרִבְקָה	אָמְרָה	אֶל-יַעֲקֹב	בְּנֶה	לֹאמֵר	הִנֵּה
And Rebekah	she said	to Jacob	her son	saying	behold
שָׁמַעְתִּי	אֶת-אָבִיךָ	מִדְבָּר	אֶל-עֵשָׂו	אֶחָיִךְ	לֹאמֵר
I heard	(to) your father	from he spoke	to Esau	your brother	saying

Then, Rebekah spoke to Jacob her son, saying, “Behold, I heard your father speaking to Esau your brother, saying,

Genesis 27:7

הַבִּיאָה	לִי	צִיד	וַעֲשֵׂה-לִי	מִטְעָמִים	וְאָכְלָה
Bring in	to me	game	and make for me	tasty dish	I will eat it
וְאִבְרַכְכָּה	לִפְנֵי	יְהוָה	לִפְנֵי	מוֹתִי	
I will bless	before	YHWH	before	my death	

“Bring me game and make for me a tasty dish that I may eat it and bless you before YHWH⁶¹ before I die.’

Genesis 27:8

וְעַתָּה	בְּנִי	שָׁמַע	בְּקוֹלִי		
And now	my son	listen	in my voice		
לְאֲשֶׁר	אֲנִי	מִצְוָה	אֲתָךְ		
to that which	I	I command	to you		

“So now, my son,⁶² listen to my voice, to that which I command⁶³ you.

Genesis 27:9

לֶךְ-נָא	אֶל-הַצֹּאן	וְקַח-לִי	מִשָּׁם	שְׁנֵי	גְדֵי	עִזִּים
Go please	to the flock	and take to me	from there	two	kids of	she-goat
טָבִים	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה	אֲתָם	מִטְעָמִים	לְאָבִיךָ	כְּאִשֶּׁר	אֱהָב
good	and I will make	to them	tasty dish	to your father	as	he loves

⁶⁰ Note the epithets as the story goes along. Esau is also Rebekah’s son, but he is referred to here as Jacob’s, reinforcing the separation felt between mother and son.

⁶¹ Jacob never said YHWH when giving his instructions to Esau, this is something Rebekah inserts when speaking with Jacob. Perhaps Rebekah has a stronger or easier sense of connection to YHWH following her direct communication with the Divine while pregnant, compared to Isaac’s trauma following the Akeidah. Or, including YHWH here may signal to the reader that Rebekah’s plan is right or approved in some way.

⁶² This is the opposite of how Rebekah interacts with Esau, showing a sense of connection between her and Jacob she does not seem to feel toward her older child.

⁶³ It is remarkable to see a woman using this verb and commanding another person, especially because this root is so prominent in patriarch deathbed stories, and she is neither a man nor is she dying.

“Go, please, to the flock and fetch me from there two choice kids, and I will make of them a tasty dish for your father such as he loves.

Genesis 27:10

וְהֵבֵאתָ	לְאָבִיךָ	וְאָכַל	בְּעִבְרָה
You will bring	to your father	he will eat	for the sake of
אֲשֶׁר	יְבָרֶכְךָ	לִפְנֵי	מוֹתוֹ
which	he will bless you	before	his death

“Then, you will bring it to your father and he will eat, so that he will bless you before his death.”

Genesis 27:11

וַיֹּאמֶר	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־רִבְקָה	אִמּוֹ	הֵן	עֹשֵׂה
He said	Jacob	to Rebekah	his mother	behold	Esau
אָחִי	אִישׁ	שָׁעַר	וְאֲנִי	אִישׁ	חֲלָק
my brother	man	hairy	and I	man	smooth

Jacob said to Rebekah his mother, “Behold, Esau my brother is a hairy man and I am a smooth man.

Genesis 27:12

אוֹלִי	יִמְשְׁנִי	אָבִי	וְהָיִיתִי	בְּעֵינָיו ⁶⁴	כַּמְתַּעֲתֵעַ
Perhaps	he will feel me	my father	and I will be	in his eyes	as deceiver
וְהֵבֵאתִי	עָלַי	קִלְלָה	וְלֹא	בְרָכָה	
and I will bring	upon me	curse	and no	blessing	

“Perhaps my father will feel me, and I shall be as a trickster in his eyes; I will bring upon myself a curse and not a blessing.”

Genesis 27:13

וַתֹּאמֶר	לּוֹ	אִמּוֹ	עָלַי	קִלְלֶתְךָ	בְּנִי
She said	to him	his mother	upon me	your curse	my son
אָךְ	שָׁמַע	בְּקוֹלִי	וְלֵךְ	קַח־לִי	
indeed	listen	in my voice	and go	take to me	

But his mother said to him, “Your curse be upon me, my son; just listen to my voice and go, fetch them for me.”

Genesis 27:14

וַיֵּלֶךְ	וַיִּקַּח	וַיָּבֵא	לְאִמּוֹ	וַתַּעַשׂ	
He went	he took	the brought	to his mother	she made	
אִמּוֹ	מִטְעָמִים	כְּאֲשֶׁר	אָהָב	אָבִיו	
his mother	tasty dish	as	he loved	his father	

⁶⁴ Isaac’s eyes are too dim to see, but Jacob still uses language about his father’s eyes metaphorically.

So, he went, and he fetched, and he brought to his mother, and his mother made a tasty dish such as his father loved.

Genesis 27:15

וַתִּקַּח	רִבְקָה	אֶת־בִּגְדֵי	עֵשָׂו	בְּנֶה ⁶⁵	הַגָּדֹל	הַחֲמֻדֹּת
She took	Rebekah	(to) clothes of	Esau	her son	the great	the desirable
אֲשֶׁר	אִתָּהּ	בְּבֵית	וַתַּלְבֵּשׁ	אֶת־יַעֲקֹב	בְּנֶה	הַקָּטָן
which	with her	in the house	she dressed	(to) Jacob	her son	the small

Then, Rebekah took the clothes of Esau her elder son, the finery which was with her in the house, and she put them on Jacob her younger son;

Genesis 27:16

וְאֵת	עֶרְתָּ	גִּדִּי	קְעִזִּים	הִלְבִּישָׁהּ
And to	skin of	kids	the she-goats	she dressed
עַל־יָדָיו	וְעַל	חֲלָקָת	צוּאָרָיו	
upon his hands	and upon	portion/smooth part	his neck	

and the skin of the kids she put on top of his hands and the smooth part of his neck.

Genesis 27:17

וַתֵּן	אֶת־הַמִּטְעָמִים	וְאֶת־הַלֶּחֶם	אֲשֶׁר
She gave	(to) the tasty dish	and (to) the bread	which
עָשָׂתָהּ	בְּיָד	יַעֲקֹב	בְּנֶה
she made	in hand	Jacob	her son

Then, she set the tasty dish and the bread that she made in the hand of Jacob her son.

Genesis 27:18

וַיָּבֹא	אֶל־אָבִיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	אָבִי	וַיֹּאמֶר
He came	to his father	he said	my father	he said
הִנְנִי	מִי	אִתָּהּ	בְּנִי	
here I am	who	you	my son	

He came to his father and said, "My father." He said, "Hineini, here I am. Who are you, my son?"

Genesis 27:19

וַיֹּאמֶר	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־אָבִיו	אֲנִי	עֵשָׂו	בְּכֹרְךָ
He said	Jacob	to his father	I	Esau	your first born
עָשִׂיתִי	כְּאֲשֶׁר	דִּבַּרְתָּ	אֵלַי	קוּם־נָא	שָׁבָה
I made	as	you said	to me	arise please	sit
וְאָכְלָהּ	מִצִּידִי	בַּעֲבוּר	תִּבְרַכְנִי	נִפְשָׁךְ	

⁶⁵ This is the first time it has referenced Esau as Rebekah's son, and, tragically, it is when she is taking his clothing to complete the deception and usurp his position as successor.

your soul/self	you will bless me	for the sake of	from my game	eat it
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Jacob said to his father, “I am Esau, your first-born. I have done as you said to me. Arise, please, sit and eat of my game so that you may bless me from your innermost being.”⁶⁶

Genesis 27:20

למצא	מקרת	מה־זֶה	אֶל־בְּנוֹ	יִצְחָק	וַיֹּאמֶר
to find	you made haste	what this	to his son	Isaac	He said

לפני	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	הִקְרָה	כִּי	וַיֹּאמֶר	בְּנִי
before me	your God	YHVH	encountered	for	he said	my son

Isaac said to his son, “What is this, that you so quickly found it my son?” He said, “Because YHWH your God⁶⁷ encountered me.”

Genesis 27:21

בְּנִי	וְאִמָּשְׁךָ	גִּשְׁה־נָּא	אֶל־יַעֲקֹב	יִצְחָק	וַיֹּאמֶר
my son	I will feel you	draw near, please	to Jacob	Isaac	He said
אִם־לֹא	עָשׂוּ	בְּנִי	זֶה	הָאֵתָהּ	
if no	Esau	my son	this	if you are	

Isaac said to Jacob, “Come near, please, that I may feel you, my son, whether you are my son Esau or not.”

Genesis 27:22

וַיֹּאמֶר	וַיִּמָּשְׁהוּ	אָבִיו	אֶל־יִצְחָק	יַעֲקֹב	וַיִּגַּשׁ
he said	he felt him	his father	to Isaac	Jacob	He drew near
עָשׂוּ	יָדָי	וְהַיָּדַיִם	יַעֲקֹב	קוֹל	הַקּוֹל
Esau	hands	and the hands	Jacob	voice	the voice

Jacob drew near to Isaac his father, and he felt him and said, “The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”

Genesis 27:23

כִּידָי	יָדָיו	כִּי־הָיוּ	הִכִּירוֹ	וְלֹא
as hands of	his hands	for there were	he recognized/discerned	And no
וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ	שַׁעֲרָת	אָחִיו	עָשׂוּ	
and he blessed him	hairy	his brother	Esau	

⁶⁶ This detail about *nafshecha* was not relayed to Jacob by Rebekah, even though the word was spoken earlier by Isaac. This could be a sign that Jacob was truly the son worthy of being the successor because he understands what bestowing such a blessing requires. At the same time, it could hint that he was listening in on the conversation between Isaac and Esau.

⁶⁷ Jacob calls YHWH “your God” because he has not yet formed a personal connection with this deity. It may also be a sign of respect for Isaac, reinforcing the primacy of his father’s relationship to God at this significant moment.

But he did not recognize him, for his hands were like the hands of Esau his brother, hairy; thus, he blessed him.

Genesis 27:24

וַיֹּאמֶר	אַתָּה	זֶה	בְּנִי	עָשׂו	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲנִי
He said	you	this	my son	Esau	he said	I

He said, “Are you my son Esau?” And he said, “I am.”

Genesis 27:25

וַיֹּאמֶר	הַגֶּשֶׁה	לִי	וְאָכְלָה	מִצֵּיד		
He said	draw near	to me	I will eat	from game		
בְּנִי	לְמַעַן	תְּבָרֶכְךָ	נַפְשִׁי	וַיִּגְשֶׁלֶן		
my son	in order that	she will bless you	my soul/self	he drew near to him		
וַיֹּאכַל	וַיָּבֵא	לּוֹ	יַיִן	וַיִּשָּׂת		
he ate	he brought	to him	wine	he drank		

He said, “Come near to me, that I may eat of my son’s⁶⁸ game, so that my innermost self may bless you.” So, he came near to him and he ate, and he brought him wine and he drank.

Genesis 27:26

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	יִצְחָק	אָבִיו	גֶּשֶׁה־נָּא	וּשְׁקֵה־לִּי	בְנִי
He said	to him	Isaac	his father	draw near please	kiss me	my son

Then, Isaac his father said to him, “Come near, please, and kiss me,⁶⁹ my son.”

Genesis 27:27

וַיִּגְשֶׁל	וַיִּשָּׁק־לּוֹ	וַיַּרְחֵ ⁷⁰	אֶת־רֵיחַ	בְּגָדָיו		
He drew near	he kissed him	he smelled	(to) smell	his clothes		
וַיְבָרְכֵהוּ	וַיֹּאמֶר	רָא ⁷¹	רֵיחַ	בְּנִי		
he blessed him	he said	see	smell	my son		
כְּרֵיחַ	שָׂדֵה	אֲשֶׁר	בֵּרַךְ	יְהוָה		
as smell	field	which	he blessed	YHVH		

He came near and kissed him, and he smelled the smell of his clothes and blessed him; he said, “See, the smell of my son is as the smell of the field that YHVH has blessed.

⁶⁸ It is interesting that Isaac stops saying Esau’s name at this point and simply says “my son.” This could be a sign of his affection for his oldest child, though it could also be an indication that on some level he knew he was speaking with Jacob, who is also his son.

⁶⁹ This part of the scene is both heartbreaking and intimidating. On the one hand, this is an intimate moment between parent and child, and perhaps the only affection Jacob has received from his father, but it is only available to him in disguise. On the other hand, there is a sinister sense that Isaac is twisting a moment of tenderness into an opportunity to ferret out deception.

⁷⁰ Isaac is relying on his other senses because he lacks sight, hoping his nose will make up for what his eyes are unable to do.

⁷¹ Isaac cannot see, but again the text uses words related to sight metaphorically.

Genesis 27:28

וּמִשְׁמֶנִּי	הַשָּׁמַיִם	מִטֵּל	הָאֱלֹהִים	וַיִּתֵּן לְךָ
and from fat of	the heavens	from dew	the God	And he will give to you
וְיַיִן טָיִב	דָּגָן	וְרֵב	הָאֲרֶץ	
and new wine	grain	and abundance	the earth	

“May God give you from the dew of the heavens and from the fat of the earth, and abundance of grain and fresh wine.

Genesis 27:29

הָיָה	לְאֻמִּים	לְךָ	[וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ] (וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ)	עַמִּים	יַעֲבֹדוךָ
may you be	nations	to you	they will bow	peoples	May they serve you
בְּנֵי	לְךָ	וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ	לְאֹחֶיךָ	גִּבּוֹר	
sons of	to you	and they will bow	to your brothers	ruler	
בְּרֹךְ	וּמְבָרְכֶיךָ	אֲרוּר	אֲרֻרֶיךָ	אִמְךָ	
bless	and your blessers	cursed	your curers	your mother	

“May people serve you and nations bow to you, may you be a ruler over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow to you. Those who curse you be cursed, and those who bless you be blessed.”

Genesis 27:30

וַיְהִי	אֶת־יַעֲקֹב	לְבָרֵךְ	יִצְחָק	כִּלָּה	כַּאֲשֶׁר	וַיְהִי
and it was	(to) Jacob	to bless	Isaac	he ceased	as	And it was
פָּנָי	מֵאֵת	יַעֲקֹב	יָצָא	יָצָא	אֵךְ	
before	from	Jacob	he went out	went out	indeed	
מִצֹּדוֹ	בָּא	אָחִיו	וַעֲשֹׂו	אָבִיו	יִצְחָק	
from his hunt	he came	his brother	and Esau	his father	Isaac	

And it happened as Isaac finished blessing Jacob, and indeed Jacob had just gone forth from before Isaac his father, that Esau his brother came back from his hunt.

Genesis 27:31

לְאָבִיו	וַיָּבֵא	מִטַּעַמִּים	גַּם־הוּא	וַיַּעַשׂ	
to his father	he brought	tasty dish	also he	He made	
וַיֹּאכַל	אָבִי	יָקָם	לְאָבִיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	
eat	my father	arise	to his father	he said	
נַפְשִׁי	וּתְבַרְכֵנִי	בְּעֵבֶר	בְּנִי	מִצֵּיד	
your soul/self	she will bless me	for the sake of	his son	from game	

He also made a tasty dish and brought it to his father and he said to his father, “Arise, my father, and eat from your son’s game, so that your innermost self may bless me.”

Genesis 27:32

וַיֹּאמֶר	לּוֹ	יִצְחָק	אָבִיו	מִי־אַתָּה
He said	to him	Isaac	his father	who are you
וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲנִי	בְנֶךָ	בְּכֹרְךָ	עֵשָׂו
he said	I	your son	your first-born	Esau

Isaac his father said to him, “Who are you?” He said, “I am your son, your first-born, Esau.”⁷²

Genesis 27:33

וַיִּחְרַד	יִצְחָק	חֲרָדָה	גְּדֹלָה	עַד־מְאֹד	וַיֹּאמֶר
He trembled	Isaac	trembling	great	until much	he said
מִי־אֲפֹא	הוּא	הַצֹּדֵצִידִּ	וַיָּבֵא	לִי	וָאָכַל
who then	he	he hunted game	he brought	to me	I ate
מִכָּל	בְּטֶרֶם	תָּבוֹא	וָאֲבֵרְכֵהוּ	גַם־בֵּרוּךְ	יְהִי־ה
from all	before	you came	I blessed him	also blessed	he will be

Isaac trembled with a great and forceful trembling, and he said, “Who was it, then, who hunted game and brought it to me, and I ate everything before you came and I blessed him? Indeed, blessed he shall be!”

Genesis 27:34

כַּשְׁמָע	עֵשָׂו	אֶת־דְּבָרֵי	אָבִיו	וַיִּצְעַק
When he heard	Esau	(to) words of	his father	he cried
צִעֲקָה	גְּדֹלָה	וּמָרָה	עַד־מְאֹד ⁷³	וַיֹּאמֶר
outcry	great	and bitter	until much	he said
לְאָבִיו	בְּרַכְנִי	גַם־אֲנִי	אֲבִי	
to his father	bless me	also I	my father	

When Esau heard his father’s words, the cried out with a very great and bitter outcry; and he said to his father, “Bless me, too, my father!”

Genesis 27:35

וַיֹּאמֶר	בָּא	אֲחִיר	בְּמַרְמָה	וַיִּקַּח	בְּרַכְתְּךָ
He said	he came	your brother	in deceit	he took	your blessing

He said, “Your brother came in deceit and he took your blessing.”

Genesis 27:36

וַיֹּאמֶר	הֲכֵן	קָרָא	שְׁמוֹ	יַעֲקֹב	וַיַּעֲקֹבֵנִי
He said	was it because	he was called	his name	Jacob	he supplanted me

⁷² The word order here builds suspense, placing Esau’s name last. It is similar in that way to the *Akeidah*, when God commands Abraham to sacrifice his son and only after providing several descriptors finally names Isaac.

⁷³ Esau’s response resonates with that of his father, and this same word pattern describes Isaac’s trembling in the previous verse.

עַתָּה	וְהִנֵּה	לִקַּח	אֶת־בְּכֹרְתִי	פַּעַמַּיִם	זֶה
now	and behold	to take	(to) my birthright	two times	this
בְּרָכָה	לִי	הֲלֹא־אֶצְלָת	וַיֹּאמֶר	בְּרָכָתִי	לִקַּח
blessing	to me	is it not you reserved	he said	my blessing	to take

He said, “Was his name called Jacob that he should supplant me twice? He took my birthright and, behold, now he has taken my blessing.” Then, he said, “Have you not reserved a blessing for me?”

Genesis 27:37

וַיַּעַן	יִצְחָק	וַיֹּאמֶר	לְעֵשָׂו	קֵן
He answered	Isaac	he said	to Esau	behold
גִּבּוֹר	שָׂמַתִּיו	לָךְ	וְאֶת־כָּל־אֶחָיו	נָתַתִּי
ruler	I set him	to you	and to all your brothers	I gave
לוֹ	לְעֹבְדִים	וְדָגָן	וְתִירָשׁ	סָמַכְתִּיו
to him	as servants	and grain	and new wine	sustain him
וְלָקָהּ	אֲפֹא	מָה	אֶעֱשֶׂה	בְּנִי
?	then	what	I will make	my son

Isaac answered and said to Esau, “Behold, I set him as ruler over you, and all your brothers I gave to him as servants, and with grain and fresh wine I supported him. What, then, can I do for you, my son?”

Genesis 27:38

וַיֹּאמֶר	עָשָׂו	אֶל־אָבִיו	הַבְּרָכָה	אֶחָת
He said	Esau	to his father	the blessing	one
הוּא־לִךְ	אָבִי	בִּרְכֵנִי	גַם־אֲנִי	אָבִי
he to you	my father	bless me	also I	my father
וַיִּשָּׂא	עָשָׂו	קוֹלוֹ	וַיִּבֶר	
he lifted up	Esau	his voice	he cried	

Esau said to his father, “Do you have but one blessing, my father? Bless me, too, my father!” And Esau raised his voice and cried.

Genesis 27:39

וַיַּעַן	יִצְחָק	אָבִיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	הִנֵּה	מִשְׁמֵנִי
He answered	Isaac	his father	he said	to him	behold	from fat of
הָאָרֶץ	יְהִיָּה	מִוֹשְׁבֶךָ	וּמִטֵּל	הַשָּׁמַיִם	מֵעַל	
the earth	it will be	your dwelling place	and from dew	the heavens	from above	

Isaac his father answered and said to him, “Behold, from the fat of the earth shall be your dwelling place, and from the dew of the heavens above.

Genesis 27:40

וְעַל־חֲרָבֶךָ	תְּחִיָּה	וְאֶת־אֶחָיו	תַּעֲבֹד	וְהִיָּה	כְּאִשָּׁר
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as	it will be	you shall serve	and to your brother	you will live	And upon your sword
תָּרִיד	וּפְרָקֶתָּ	עָלָיו	מֵעַל	צוֹאֲרֶךְ	
you will be restless	you will break away	his yoke	from upon	your neck	

“But by your sword shall you live, and your brother shall you serve; but it will happen that you shall become restless and you shall break his yoke from upon your neck.”

Genesis 27:41

וַיִּשְׂטֵם	עֵשָׂו	אֶת־יַעֲקֹב	עַל־הַבְּרָכָה	אֲשֶׁר	בֵּרַךְ
He bore a grudge	Esau	(to) Jacob	upon the blessing	which	he blessed him
אָבִיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	עֵשָׂו	בְּלִבּוֹ	יִקְרְבוּ	יָמָיו
his father	he said	Esau	in his heart	they will come near	days of
אָבִל	אָבִי	וְאַהֲרַגְהָ	אֶת־יַעֲקֹב	אֶחָי	
mourning	my father	I will kill	(to) Jacob	my brother	

Esau bore a grudge against Jacob over the blessing that his father blessed him, and Esau said in his heart, “The days of mourning my father will end, and I will kill Jacob my brother.”

Genesis 27:42

וַיִּגַּד	לְרִבְקָה	אֶת־דְּבָרָיו	עֵשָׂו	בְּנָהּ	הַגָּדֹל	וַתִּשְׁלַח
It was told	to Rebekah	(to) words of	Esau	her son	the great	she sent
וַתִּקְרָא	לְיַעֲקֹב	בְּנָהּ	הַקָּטָן	וַתֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	
she called	to Jacob	her son	the younger	she said	to him	
הִנֵּה	עֹשֵׂו	אֶחָיְךָ	מִתְנַחֵם	לָךְ	לְהַרְגֶּךָ	
behold	Esau	your brother	he consoles himself	going	to kill you	

Rebekah was told about the words of Esau her elder son, so she sent and called for Jacob her younger son, and she said to him, “Behold, Esau your brother is consoling himself by planning to kill you.

Genesis 27:43

וְעַתָּה	בְּנִי	שָׁמַע	בְּקוֹלִי	וְקוּם	
And now	my son	listen	in my voice	arise	
בְּרַח־לָךְ	אֶל־לָבָן	אֶחָי	חַרְנֶה		
flee yourself	to Laban	my brother	toward Haran		

“So now, my son, listen to my voice; arise, flee to Laban my brother in Haran.

Genesis 27:44

וַיֵּשְׁבֶתָּ	עִמּוֹ	יָמִים	אֲחֵדָיִם		
You shall dwell	with him	days	a certain		
עַד	אֲשֶׁר־תָּשׁוּב	חֲמַת	אֶחָיְךָ		
until	which it will return	rage	your brother		

“You shall stay with him a certain number of days, until your brother’s rage turns back,

Genesis 27:45

עַד-שׁוּב	אֶף-אֲחִיךָ	מִמֶּךָ	וְשָׁכַח	אֶת
Until turn	anger your brother	from you	he forgets	(to)
אֲשֶׁר-עָשִׂיתָ ⁷⁴	לּוֹ	וְשִׁלַּחְתִּי	וְלִקַּחְתִּיךָ	מִשָּׁם
which you did	to him	and I will send	I will take you	from there
לָמָּה	אֲשַׁכֵּל	גַּם-שְׁנֵיכֶם	יוֹם	אֶחָד
why	I will be bereaved	also two of you	day	one

“until your brother’s anger turns back from you and he forgets that which you did to him, and I will send and fetch you from there. Why should I be bereft of you two in one day?”

Genesis 27:46

וְתָאמַר	רִבְקָה	אֶל-יִצְחָק	קִצְתִּי	בְחַיִּי	מִפְנֵי
She said	Rebekah	to Isaac	I abhor	in my life	because of
בָּנוֹת	חֵת	אִם-לִקְחָם	יַעֲקֹב	אִשָּׁה	מִבְּנוֹת-חֵת
daughters	Heth	if he takes	Jacob	wife	from daughters of Heth
כָּאלֵהָ	מִבְּנוֹת	הָאָרֶץ	לָמָּה	לִי	חַיִּים
as these	from daughters	the land	why	to me	life

Then, Rebekah said to Isaac, “I abhor my life because of the daughters of Heth! If Jacob should take a wife from the daughters of Heth such as these, from the daughters of the land, why do I live?”⁷⁵

Genesis 28:1

וַיִּקְרָא	יִצְחָק	אֶל-יַעֲקֹב	וַיְבָרֶךְ	אֹתוֹ	וַיְצַוֵּהוּ
He called	Isaac	to Jacob	he blessed	to him	he commanded him
וַיֹּאמֶר	לּוֹ	לֹא-תִקַּח	אִשָּׁה	מִבְּנוֹת	כְּנָעַן
he said	to him	no you will take	woman	from daughters	Canaan

Isaac called to Jacob and he blessed him; he commanded him saying, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.

Genesis 28:2

קוּם	לךְ	פָּדָנָה	אָרָם	בֵּיתָה
Arise	go	toward Padan	Aram	the house of
בְּתוּאֵל	אָבִי	אִמְךָ	וְקַח-לָךְ	מִשָּׁם
Bethuel	my father	your mother	and take to you	from there
אִשָּׁה	מִבְּנוֹת	לָבָן	אֹחִי	אִמְךָ
woman	from daughters	Laban	my brother	your mother

⁷⁴ Startling to see Rebekah use the male singular form here, “that which *you* did” given that she was the mastermind behind this deception. She seems to be skirting her responsibility by conjugating the verb in this way.

⁷⁵ This verse mirrors Rebekah’s cry to God when she was pregnant and in pain, heightening the drama of this situation and comparing her hatred of her daughters-in-law to the challenge of her pregnancy.

“Arise, go to Padan-Aram, the house of Bethuel, your mother’s father, and take for yourself from there a woman from the daughters of Laban, your mother’s brother.

Genesis 28:3

וְאֵל	שְׁדַי	יְבָרֶכְךָ	אֵתְךָ	וַיַּפְרֶךְ
And El	Shaddai	he blessed	to you	and he will make you fruitful
וְיִרְבֶּךָ	וְהָיִיתָ	לְקֶהֱלָהּ	עַמִּים	
you will become great	you shall be	to assembly	peoples	

“And may El Shaddai bless you and make you fruitful, that you may become a great assembly of peoples.

Genesis 28:4

וַיִּתֵּן-לָךְ	אֶת-בְּרִכְתּוֹ	אֲבִרָהִם	לָךְ	וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ	אִתְּךָ
He will give to you	(to) blessing of	Abraham	to you	and to your seed	with you
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ	אֶת-אֶרֶץ	מִגְלִיךָ	אֲשֶׁר-נָתַן	אֱלֹהִים	לְאֲבִרָהִם
that you will seize	(to) land	your sojourning	which he gave	God	to Abraham

“May He give you the blessing of Abraham, to you and to your offspring together, that you may possess the land of your sojourning, which God gave to Abraham.”

Genesis 28:5

וַיִּשְׁלַח	יִצְחָק	אֶת-יַעֲקֹב	וַיֵּלֶךְ	כְּדָנָה
He sent	Isaac	to Jacob	he went	toward Padan
אֲרָם	אֶל-לָבָן	בֶּן-בְּתוּאֵל	הָאַרְמֵי	אָחִי
Aram	to Laban	son of Bethuel	the Aramean	my brother
רִבְקָה	אִם	יַעֲקֹב	וְעֵשָׂו	
Rebekah	mother	Jacob	and Esau	

Isaac sent Jacob off, and he went to Padan-Aram to Laban, son of Bethuel the Aramean, brother of Rebekah, mother of Jacob and Esau.⁷⁶

Genesis 28:6

וַיֵּרָא	עֵשָׂו	כִּי-בֵרַךְ	יִצְחָק	אֶת-יַעֲקֹב	וַיִּשְׁלַח
He saw	Esau	for he blessed	Isaac	(to) Jacob	he sent
אֵתָּה	כְּדָנָה	אֲרָם	לְקַחְתָּ-לָּהּ	מִשָּׁם	
to him	toward Padan	Aram	to take to him	from there	
אִשָּׁה	בְּבָרְכּוֹ	אֵתָּה	וַיִּצְוֶה	עָלָיו	
woman	in his blessing him	to him	he commanded	upon him	
לֵאמֹר	לֹא-תִקַּח	אִשָּׁה	מִבָּנוֹת	כְּנָעַן	
saying	no you shall take	woman	from daughters	Canaan	

⁷⁶ It is notable that Rebekah is listed here as the mother of both Jacob and Esau, even after all the pain she put her oldest child through.

And Esau saw that Isaac blessed Jacob and had sent him to Padan-Aram to take him a wife from there when he blessed him and commanded him saying, “You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan.”

Genesis 28:7

וַיִּשְׁמַע	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־אָבִיו	וְאֶל־אִמּוֹ	וַיֵּלֶךְ	כַּדְנָה	אַרָם
He listened	Jacob	to his father	and to his mother	he went	toward Padan	Araom

And Jacob listened to his father and to his mother, and he went to Padan-Aram.

Genesis 28:8

וַיֵּרָא	עֵשָׂו	כִּי	רָעוֹת	בָּנוֹת
He saw	Esau	because	evils	daughters

כְּעֵינָיו	בְּעֵינָיו	יִצְחָק	אָבִיו
Canaan	in the eyes of	Isaac	is father

Esau saw that the daughters of Canaan were evil in the eyes of Isaac his father.⁷⁷

Genesis 28:9

וַיֵּלֶךְ	עֵשָׂו	אֶל־יִשְׁמָעֵאל	וַיִּקַּח			
He went	Esau	to Ishmael	he took			
אֶת־מַחְלַת	בַּת־יִשְׁמָעֵאל	בֶּן־אַבְרָהָם	אָחוֹת			
(to) Mahalath	daughter of Ishmael	son of Abraham	sister			
נְבִיאוֹת	עַל־נָשָׁיו	לּוֹ	לְאִשָּׁה			
Nebaioth	upon his wives	to him	to wife			

So, Esau went to Ishmael⁷⁸ and he took Mahalath, daughter of Ishmael son of Abraham, sister of Nebaioth, in addition to his wives, as a wife.

Genesis 35:27

וַיָּבֹא	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־יִצְחָק	אָבִיו	מִמְרָא	קִרְיַת	
He came	Jacob	to Isaac	his father	from Mamre	city of	
הָאַרְבַּע	הָאֵלֶּה	חֶבְרוֹן	אֲשֶׁר־גֵּרָשָׁם	אַבְרָהָם	וַיִּצְחָק	
the Arba	he	Hebron	which sojourned there	Abraham	and Isaac	

Jacob came to Isaac his father in Mamre, at Kiriath-Arba, which is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac had sojourned.

Genesis 35:28

⁷⁷ Again, the language used plays with vision metaphorically, both that of Esau and Isaac. Also, it was Rebekah who was so against the daughters of Canaan, Isaac merely assented.

⁷⁸ These two men were both disinherited from their blessing, from their rights as first-born sons, which may have created a bond between them and a desire to upset the people who put them in such a position.

שָׁנָה	וּשְׁמִנִּים	שָׁנָה	מֵאָתָה	יִצְחָק	יָמָיו	וַיְהִיו
year	and eighty	years	one hundred	Isaac	days of	They were

Isaac's days numbered one hundred and eighty years.

Genesis 35:29

וַיָּגָע	יִצְחָק	וַיָּמָת	וַיֵּאָסֶף	אֶל-עַמּוּיוֹ	זָקֵן	וַיִּשָּׁבַע
He expired	Isaac	he died	he was gathered	to his people	old	and sated

יָמָיו	וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	אֵתוֹ	עֵשָׂו	וַיַּעֲקֹב	בָּנָיו
days	they buried	to him	Esau	and Jacob	his sons

Isaac expired and he died, and he was gathered to his people, old and sated in days; Esau and Jacob his sons buried him.

Translation: Moses' Death
Deuteronomy 31:1-30, 32:45-52, 34:1-12

Deuteronomy 31:1

וַיֵּלֶךְ	מֹשֶׁה	וַיְדַבֵּר	אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל
He went	Moses	he spoke	(to) the words	these	to all Israel

Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:2

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲלֵהֶם	בֶּן־מֵאָה	וְעֶשְׂרִים	שָׁנָה	אֲנִי
He said	to them	one hundred	twenty	year	I
הַיּוֹם	לֹא־אֹכֵל	עוֹד	לְצֵאת	וּלְבֹא	יְהוָה
today	I cannot	still	to exit	and to come	and YHWH
אָמַר	אֵלַי	לֹא	תַעֲבֹר	אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן	הַזֶּה
said	to me	no	you shall pass over	(to) the Jordan	this

He said to them, "One hundred and twenty years old I am today; I can no longer go out and come in, and YHWH has said to me, 'You shall not cross over this Jordan.'

Deuteronomy 31:3

יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	הוא	עָבַר	לפְנֶיךָ	הוא־יִשְׁמִיד
YHWH	your God	he	passes over	before you	he will destroy
אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם	הָאֵלֶּה	מִלִּפְנֶיךָ	וַיִּרְשָׁתָם	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	הוא
(to) the nations	these	from before you	you will seize	Joshua	he
עָבַר	לפְנֶיךָ	כַּאֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר	יְהוָה	יְהוָה
passes over	before you	which	spoke	YHWH	YHWH

"YHWH your God crosses over before you, He will destroy these nations before you and you shall dispossess them. Joshua crosses over before you, as YHWH has spoken.

Deuteronomy 31:4

וַעֲשֵׂה	יְהוָה	לָהֶם	כַּאֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	לְסִיחֹן	וּלְעוֹג
He will do	YHWH	to them	which	he did	to Sihon	and to Og
מְלָכֵי	הָאֱמֹרִי	וּלְאַרְצָם	אֲשֶׁר	הִשְׁמִיד	אֹתָם	
kings	the Amorites	and to their land	which	he destroyed	them	

"YHWH shall do to them that which He did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them.

Deuteronomy 31:5

וַתֵּן	יְהוָה	לפְנֵיכֶם	וַעֲשִׂיתֶם	לָהֶם	וְתַעֲשֶׂה
He will give	YHWH	before you	you will do	to them	and to Og
כָּל־הַמִּצְוָה	אֲשֶׁר	צִוִּיתִי	אֲתָכֶם	לָכֶם	
as all the command	which	I commanded	to you	to them	

“YHVH shall give them before you, and you shall do to them according to all the command that I have commanded you.

Deuteronomy 31:6

מִפְּנֵיהֶם	וְאַל-תַּעֲרָצוּ	אֶל-תִּירָאוּ	וְאַמְצוּ	חֲזָקוּ
from them	and do not dread	do not fear	and be brave	Be strong
הֵלֵךְ	הוא	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	יְהוָה	כִּי
the walks	He	your God	YHVH	for
יַעֲזָבְךָ	וְלֹא	יִרְפָּךָ	לֹא	עִמָּךְ
he will leave you	and no	he will drop you	no	with you

“Be strong and courageous, and neither fear nor dread them; for YHVH your God, He is Who walks with you, He will not forsake or abandon you.”

Deuteronomy 31:7

לְעֵינַי	אֵלָיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	לְיוֹשֻׁעַ	מֹשֶׁה	וַיִּקְרָא
to the eyes	to him	he said	to Joshua	Moses	He called
תָּבוֹא	אַתָּה	כִּי	וְאַמַּץ	חֲזָק	כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל
you will come	you	for	and be brave	be strong	all Israel
יְהוָה	נִשְׁבַּע	אֲשֶׁר	אֶל-הָאָרֶץ	הַזֹּאת	אֶת-הָעָם
YHVH	he swore	which	to the land	this	(to) the people
אֹתָם	תִּנְחִילָנָה	וְאַתָּה	לָהֶם	לָתֵת	לְאֲבֹתָם
to them	you will allot	and you	to them	to give	to their fathers

Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him before the eyes of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you will come with this people to the land which YHVH swore to their fathers to give to them, and you will apportion it to them.

Deuteronomy 31:8

הוא	לפניך	ההלך	הוא	ויהוה
he	before you	the walks	he	And YHVH
וְלֹא	יִרְפָּךָ	לֹא	עִמָּךְ	יְהִיָּה
and no	he will drop you	no	with you	he will be
תִּתָּךְ	וְלֹא	תִירָא	לֹא	יַעֲזָבְךָ
you will be dismayed	and no	you will fear	no	he will leave you

“And YHVH, He is Who walks before you, He will be with you and will not forsake or abandon you; you shall not fear and you shall not be dismayed.”

Deuteronomy 31:9

וַיִּתְּנָה	הַזֹּאת	אֶת-הַתּוֹרָה	מֹשֶׁה	וַיִּכְתֹּב
he gave	this	(to) the Torah	Moses	He wrote
אֶת-אֲרֹן	הַנְּשִׂאִים	לִי	בְנִי	אֶל-הַכְּהֹנִים

(to) the ark	the they bear	Levi	sons	to the priests
יִשְׂרָאֵל	וְאֶל־כָּל־זִקְנֵי	יְהוָה	בְּרִית	
Israel	and to all elders	YHVH	covenant	

Moses wrote this Teaching and gave it to the priests, sons of Levi, who bear the Ark of the Covenant of YHVH, and to all the elders of Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:10

וַיֹּצֵא	מֹשֶׁה	אוֹתָם	לֵאמֹר	מִקֵּץ	שִׁבְעַ
He commanded	Moses	to them	saying	from end	seven
שָׁנִים	בְּמִעֹד	שָׁנָה	הַשְּׁמִטָּה	בְּחַג	הַסִּבּוֹת
years	in appointed	year of	the release	in the festival	the booths

Then, Moses commanded them saying, “At the end of seven years, in the appointed sabbatical year, at the Festival of Booths,

Deuteronomy 31:11

בָּבוֹא	כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	לִרְאוֹת	אֶת־פְּנֵי	יְהוָה	
In coming	all Israel	to appear	(to) face	YHVH	
אֱלֹהֶיךָ	בְּמָקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	יִבְחַר	תִּקְרָא	
your God	in the place	which	He will choose	you will read	
אֶת־הַתּוֹרָה	הַזֹּאת	נֶגֶד	כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּאָזְנוֹהֶם	
(to) the Torah	this	against	all Israel	in their ears	

“when all Israel comes to appear before the presence of YHVH your God, in the place which He shall choose, you shall read this Teaching in the ears of all Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:12

הַקָּהָל	אֶת־הָעָם	הָאֲנָשִׁים	וְהַנְּשִׁים	וְהַטָּף	
Assemble	(to) the people	the men	and the women	and the children	
וְגֵרְךָ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּשַׁעְרֶיךָ	לְמַעַן	יִשְׁמְעוּ	
and your sojourner	which	in your gates	for the sake of	they will hear	
וּלְמַעַן	יִלְמְדוּ	וַיִּרְאוּ	אֶת־יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	
and for the sake of	they will learn	and they will fear	(to) YHVH	their God	
וְשָׁמְרוּ	לַעֲשׂוֹת	אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרֵי	הַתּוֹרָה	הַזֹּאת	
they will guard	to do	(to) all words	the Torah	this	

“Assemble the people, men, women, and children, and your sojourner who is within your gates, so that they may hear and so that they may learn, and they will fear YHVH their God and keep to do all the words of this Teaching.

Deuteronomy 31:13

וּבְנֵיהֶם	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא־יָדְעוּ	יִשְׁמְעוּ	וְלִמְדוּ	
And their sons	which	no they know	they will hear	they will learn	

לִירָאָה	אֶת־יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	כָּל־הַיָּמִים	אֲשֶׁר
fear	(to) YHVH	their God	all the days	which
אַתֶּם	חַיִּים	עַל־הָאֲדָמָה	אֲשֶׁר	אַתֶּם
you all	live	upon the soil	which	you all
עֲבֹרִים	אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן	שָׁמָּה	לְרִשְׁתָּהּ	
go in	(to) the Jordan	there	to seize	

“And their children, who do not know, they shall hear and learn to fear YHVH their God all the days that you live upon the soil that you are about to cross the Jordan to take possession of.”

Deuteronomy 31:14

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל־מֹשֶׁה	קֵן	קִרְבִּי
He said	YHVH	to Moses	they, behold	come near
יָמֶיךָ	לְמוֹת	קָרָא	אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	וְהִתְיַצְבוּ
your days	to die	call	(to) Joshua	set yourselves
בְּאֵהָל	מוֹעֵד	וְאֶצְוֵנוּ	וַיֵּלֶךְ	מֹשֶׁה
in tent	appointed	and I will command	he went	Moses
וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ	וַיִּתְיַצְבוּ	בְּאֵהָל	מוֹעֵד	
and Joshua	they set themselves	in tent	appointed	

YHVH said to Moses, “Behold, your time to die is drawing near; call to Joshua and station yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may command him.” Moses went, and Joshua, and they stationed themselves in the Tent of Meeting.

Deuteronomy 31:15

וִירָא	יְהוָה	בְּאֵהָל	בְּעַמֻּד	עָנָן
He appeared	YHVH	in tent	in pillar	cloud
וַיַּעֲמֵד	עַמֻּד	הָעָנָן	עַל־פֶּתַח	הָאֵהָל
he stood	pillar	the cloud	upon opening	the tent

Then, YHVH appeared in the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stayed over the entrance of the Tent.

Deuteronomy 31:16

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	אֶל־מֹשֶׁה	הִנֵּךְ	שָׁכַב	עִם־אֲבוֹתֶיךָ
He said	YHVH	to Moses	behold you	lie down	with your fathers
וְקָם	הָעָם	הַזֶּה	וְזָנָה	אַחֲרַי	אֵלָי
rise up	the people	this	whore	after	gods
נִכְרַ־הָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	הוּא	בֹּא־שָׁמָּה	בְּקִרְבִּי	וְעִזְבֵּנִי
foreign the land	which	he	come there	in its midst	will forsake me
וְהִפָּרַ	אֶת־בְּרִיתִי	אֲשֶׁר	כָּרַתִּי	אִתּוֹ	
will break	(to) my covenant	which	I cut	to it	

YHWH said to Moses, “Behold, you are about to lie with your ancestors; this people will rise up and whore after the alien gods of the land into the midst of which it is coming, it will forsake Me and break My covenant that I cut with it.

Deuteronomy 31:17

וְעִזְבֹתִים	בְּיוֹם־הַהוּא	בּוֹ	אֶפְי	וַחֲרָה
I will forsake them	on that day	in it	my nose	It will burn
לְאֹכֶל	וְהָיָה	מֵהֶם	פָּנִי	וְהִסְתַּרְתִּי
for food	and it will be	from them	my face	I will hide
וְאָמַר	וּצְרוֹת	רַבּוֹת	רָעוֹת	וּמִצָּאָהוּ
he will say	and troubles	many	evils	they will find
כִּי־אֵין	עַל	הֵלֵא	הַהוּא	בְּיוֹם
for is not	upon	not	that	on the day
הָאֵלֶּה	הַרָעוֹת	מִצָּאוֹנִי	בְּקִרְבִּי	אֱלֹהִי
these	the evils	they have found me	in my midst	my God

“My wrath will flare against them on that day, and I shall forsake them and hide my face from them. They will be as prey, and many evils and troubles will find them, and they shall say on that day, ‘Is it not because our God is not in our midst that these evils have found us?’

Deuteronomy 31:18

עַל	הַהוּא	בְּיוֹם	פָּנִי	אֶסְתִּיר	הִסְתַּר	וְאֲנִי
upon	that	on the day	my face	I will hide	hide	And I
אֲחֵרִים	אֱלֹהִים־אֲחֵרִים	פָּנָה	כִּי	עָשָׂה	אֲשֶׁר	כָּל־הָרָעָה
others	to gods	it turns	for	it does	which	all the evil

“Yet I will surely hide My face on that day for all the evil that they have done, for they turned to other gods.

Deuteronomy 31:19

וְלִמְדָהּ	הַזֹּאת	אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה	לָכֶם	כְּתֹבוּ	וְעַתָּה
and teach it	this	(to) the poem	to them	write	And now
תִּהְיֶה־לִּי	לְמַעַן	בְּפִיהֶם	שִׁמָּה	אֶת־בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל	
it will be to me	in order that	in their mouths	place it	(to) sons of Israel	
יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּבָנֵי	לְעֵד	הַזֹּאת	הַשִּׁירָה	
Israel	in sons	as witness	this	the poem	

“And now, write you this poem and teach it to the children of Israel, put it in their mouths, in order that this poem may be for Me a witness against the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:20

חִלְבִּי	זֹבֶת	לְאֲבֹתָיו	אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	אֶל־הָאֲדָמָה	כִּי־אָבִיאוּ
milk	flowing	to their fathers	which I swore	to the soil	For I will bring them

וּדְבַשׁ	וְאָכַל	וְשָׂבַע	וְדָשֵׁן	וּפְנָה	אֶל־אֱלֹהִים
and honey	it will eat	it will be sated	it will grow fat	it will turn	to gods
אֲחֵרִים	וְעָבְדוּם	וְנִאֲצוּנִי	וְהִפָּר	אֶת־בְּרִיתִי	
others	and serve	spurn	break	(to) my covenant	

“For I will bring them to the soil which I swore to their fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and they will eat and be sated and grow fat; then they will turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant.

Deuteronomy 31:21

וְהָיָה	כִּי־תִמְצְאוּ	אֵלָיו	רָעוֹת	רַבּוֹת	וְצָרוֹת
It will be	for they find	to him	evils	many	and troubles
וְעֹנֶתָהּ	הַשִּׁירָה	הַזֹּאת	לִפְנֵיו	לְעֵד	כִּי
it will answer	the poem	this	before him	to witness	for
לֹא	תִשְ�כַּח	מִפִּי	זֵרְעוֹ	כִּי	יָדַעְתִּי
no	it will be forgotten	from mouth	his seed	for	I knew
אֶת־יָצְרוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	הוא	עֹשֶׂה	הַיּוֹם	
(to) his devising	which	he	does	today	
בְּטָרִם	אֲבִיָּאֵנוּ	אֶל־הָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	
before	I will bring them	to the land	which	I swore	

“It shall be, when many evils and troubles find them, that this song shall testify before them as witness, for it shall not be forgotten from the mouths of their offspring; for I know their devisings that they make today, before I brought them to the land which I swore.”

Deuteronomy 31:22

וַיִּכְתֹּב	מֹשֶׁה	אֶת־הַשִּׁירָה	הַזֹּאת	בַּיּוֹם	
He wrote	Moses	(to) the poem	this	on the day	
הַקּוֹא	לְיִלְמֹדָהּ	אֶת־בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל		
that	he taught	(to) sons	Israel		

Moses wrote down this poem on that day and taught it to the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 31:23

וַיִּצַּו	אֶת־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	בֶּן־נּוּן	נֵאמָר	חֲזָק	וְאַמֵּץ
He commanded	(to) Joshua	son of Nun	he said	be strong	be courageous
כִּי	אַתָּה	תְּבִיא	אֶת־בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶל־הָאָרֶץ
for	you	you will bring	(to) sons	Israel	to the land
אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	לָהֶם	וְאֹנִכִּי	אֹהֶיָּה	עִמָּךְ	
which I promised	to them	and I	I will be	with you	

Then, he commanded Joshua son of Nun saying, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the children of Israel to the land which I promised to them, and I shall be with you.”⁷⁹

Deuteronomy 31:24

וַיְהִי	כְּכֹלֹת	מֹשֶׁה	לְכַתֵּב	אֶת־דְּבָרָיו
It was	as he completed	Moses	to write	(to) words
הַתּוֹרָה־הַזֹּאת	עַל־סֵפֶר	עַד	תָּמָם	
the Torah this	upon book	until	their end	

And it happened, as Moses finished writing the words of this Teaching in a book to their end,

Deuteronomy 31:25

וַיֹּצֵא	מֹשֶׁה	אֶת־הַלְוִיִּים	נֹשְׂאֵי	אֲרוֹן	בְּרִית־יְהוָה	לֵאמֹר
he commanded	Moses	(to) the Levites	bearers	ark	covenant YHVH	saying

Moses commanded the Levites, bearers of the Ark of the Covenant of YHVH, saying,

Deuteronomy 31:26

לָקַח	אֶת	סֵפֶר	הַתּוֹרָה	הַזֹּאת	וְשָׂמְתֶם	אֹתוֹ
Take	(to)	book	the Torah	this	you will put	it
מִצֵּד	אֲרוֹן	בְּרִית־יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	וְהָיָה־שָׁם	בְּךָ	לְעֵד
beside	ark	covenant YHVH	your God	it will be there	in you	as witness

“Take this book of Teaching and place it beside the Ark of the Covenant of YHVH your God, and it shall be there as witness against you.

Deuteronomy 31:27

כִּי	אֲנִכִּי	יָדַעְתִּי	אֶת־מְרִיָּךְ	וְאֶת־עֲרֹפְךָ	הַקָּשָׁה	
For	I	I knew	(to) your rebelliousness	and (to) your neck	to hard	
הֵן	בְּעוֹדִנִי	חַי	עִמָּךְ	הַיּוֹם	מִמָּרִים	
behold	I am yet	living	with you	today	they rebel	
הָיִיתֶם	עִם־יְהוָה	וְאַף	כִּי־אַחֲרַי	מוֹתִי		
you were	with YHVH	and even	for after	my death		

“For I myself knew your rebelliousness and your stiff neck. Behold, as I am still living with you today you rebelled against YHVH, and how much more so after my death!

Deuteronomy 31:28

הַקְהִילוּ	אֵלַי	אֶת־כָּל־זִקְנֵי	שְׁבִטֵיכֶם	וְשֹׁטְרֵיכֶם	וְאִדְבַּרְהָ	בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם
Assemble	to me	(to) all elders	your tribes	and your officials	I will speak	in their ears
אֶת	הַדְּבָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	וְאֶעִידָה	בָּם	אֶת־הַשָּׁמַיִם	וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
(to)	the words	these	I will call to witness	in them	(to) the heavens	and (to) the earth

⁷⁹ This is a highly emotional moment, because Moses will not physically be with Joshua but he is acknowledging a metaphysical presence to bring Joshua (and possibly himself) some comfort and assurance.

“Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officials, and I will speak in their hearing these words, that I may call to witness against them the heavens and the earth.

Deuteronomy 31:29

תַּשְׁחִיתוּן	כִּי־הַשְׁחַת	מוֹתִי	אַחֲרַי	יָדַעְתִּי	כִּי
you will destroy	for destroy	my death	after	I knew	For
וְקָרָאת	אֲתֶכֶם	צִוִּיתִי	אֲשֶׁר	מִן־הַדֶּרֶךְ	וְסָרְתֶם
will call	to you all	I commanded	which	from the path	you will turn aside
אֶת־הָרָע	כִּי־תַעֲשׂוּ	הַיָּמִים	בְּאַחֲרִית	הָרָעָה	אֲתֶכֶם
(to) the evil	for you will do	the days	in the end	the evil	to you all
יְדֵיכֶם	בְּמַעֲשֵׂה	לְהַכְעִיזוּ	יְהוָה	בְּעֵינֵי	
your hands	in deeds	to provoke anger	YHVH	in the eyes of	

For I know, after my death you will surely act destructively and turn away from the path which I commanded you; the evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do evil in the eyes of YHVH, to vex Him with the deeds of your hands.”

Deuteronomy 31:30

יִשְׂרָאֵל	כָּל־קֶהֱל	בְּאָזְנִי	מֹשֶׁה	וַיְדַבֵּר	
Israel	all the assembly	in the ears	Moses	He spoke	
תָּמָם	עַד	הַזֹּאת	הַשִּׁירָה	אֶת־דִּבְרֵי	
their end	until	this	the poem	(to) words of	

Then, Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this poem until their end:

Deuteronomy 32:45

הַשִּׁירָה־זֹאת	אֶת־כָּל־דִּבְרֵי	וַיְדַבֵּר	מֹשֶׁה	וַיָּבֹא	
this poem	(to) all words	he spoke	Moses	He came	
בְּנִי־נֹון	וְהוֹשֵׁעַ	הוא	הָעָם	בְּאָזְנִי	
son of Nun	and Joshua	he	the people	in the ears	

Moses came and spoke all the words of this poem in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua son of Nun.

Deuteronomy 32:45

אֶל־כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	הָאֵלֶּה	אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים	לְדַבֵּר	מֹשֶׁה	וַיִּקַּל
to all Israel	these	(to) all the words	to speak	Moses	He ceased

And Moses finished speaking all these words to all Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:46

אֲשֶׁר	לְכָל־הַדְּבָרִים	לְבַבְכֶּם	שִׁמּוֹ	אֲלֵהֶם	וַיֹּאמֶר
which	to all the words	to your heart	place	to them	He said

אָנְכִי	מַעֲיֵד	בְּכֶם	הַיּוֹם	אֲשֶׁר	תְּצַוֶּם
I	bear witness	in you all	today	which	you command
אֶת־בְּנֵיכֶם	לְשָׁמֵר	לַעֲשׂוֹת	אֶת־כָּל־דְּבָרִי	הַתּוֹרָה	הַזֹּאת
(to) your sons	to guard	to do	(to) all words	the Torah	this

He said to them, "Set your hearts to all the words which I bear witness against you today, that you will command your children to keep and to do all the words of this Teaching.

Deuteronomy 32:47

כִּי־הוּא	מִכֶּם	הוּא	רֵק	לֹא־דָבָר	כִּי
for he	from you all	he	empty	no thing	For
עַל־הָאֲדָמָה	יָמִים	תִּאָּרְכּוּ	הַזֶּה	וּבְדָבָר	חַיֵּיכֶם
upon the soil	days	you will lengthen	this	and in the thing	your lives
לְרִשְׁתָּהּ	שָׁמָּה	אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן	עֹבְרִים	אֵלֵיכֶם	אֲשֶׁר
to take possession of it	there	(to) the Jordan	they go in	to you all	which

"For it is not an empty thing for you, but it is your life, and through this thing you shall prolong your days upon the soil, which you are about to cross the Jordan to take possession of there."

Deuteronomy 32:48

וַיֹּדְבַר	יְהוָה	אֶל־מֹשֶׁה	בְּעֶצֶם	הַיּוֹם	הַזֶּה	לֵאמֹר
He said	YHVH	to Moses	very	the day	this	saying

YHVH spoke to Moses on that very day, saying,

Deuteronomy 32:49

עֲלֵה	אֶל־הָרִי	הָעֲבָרִים	הַזֶּה	הַר־נֹבֹ
Go up	to mountain	the Abarim	this	Mount Nebo
אֲשֶׁר	בְּאֶרֶץ	מוֹאָב	אֲשֶׁר	עַל־פְּנֵי
which	in land	Moab	which	upon face of
יִרְחֹוּ	וְרָאָהּ	אֶת־אֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	אֲשֶׁר
Jericho	and see	(to) land	Canaan	which
אֲנִי	נָתַן	לְבָנִי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְאֻחֲזָהּ
I	give	to sons	Israel	for possession

"Ascend to Mount Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, which faces Jericho, and see the land of Canaan that I am about to give to the children of Israel as a possession.

Deuteronomy 32:50

וּמָתָה	בַּהֲרִי	אֲשֶׁר	אֵתָהּ	עָלָה
And die	on the mountain	which	you	go up
שָׁמָּה	וְהִאָּסַף	אֶל־עַמּוֹךְ	כַּאֲשֶׁר־מָתָה	אַהֲרֹן
there	gathered	to your people	as which died	Aaron
אַחֲרָיו	בְּהָרִי	הַהוּא	וַיִּאָּסַף	אֶל־עַמּוֹ

to his people	he was gathered	the mountain	on Hor	your brother
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“And die⁸⁰ on the mountain which you are about to ascend there, and be gathered to your people, as your brother Aaron died upon Hor the Mountain and was gathered to his people,

Deuteronomy 32:51

עלִי	אֲשֶׁר	מַעֲלֵתֶם	בִּי	בְּתוֹךְ	בְּנֵי
Upon	which	you broke faith	in me	in the midst	sons
יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּמִי־מְרִיבָה	קִדְשׁ	מִדְּבַר־זִין	עַל	אֲשֶׁר
Israel	in waters Meribah	Kadesh	desert Zin	upon	which
לֹא־קִדְשֵׁתֶם	אוֹתִי	בְּתוֹךְ	בְּנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
no you sanctified	to me	in the midst	sons	Israel	

“because you two broke faith with Me in the midst of the children of Israel through the waters of Meribath-Kadesh in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not sanctify Me in the midst of the children of Israel.

Deuteronomy 32:52

כִּי	מִנֶּגֶד	תִּרְאֶה	אֶת־הָאָרֶץ	וְשָׁמָּה	לֹא
For	in front of	you will see	(to) the land	and there	no
תָּבוֹא	אֶל־הָאָרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר־אֲנִי	נֹתֵן	לְבָנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
you will come	to the land	which I	give	to sons	Israel

For from afar you will see the land, but you will not come there, to the land which I give to the children of Israel.”

Deuteronomy 34:1

וַיַּעַל	מֹשֶׁה	מֵעֶרְבַת	מּוֹאָב	אֶל־הַר	נֶבֹז
He went up	Moses	from the steppes	Moab	to mountain	Nebo
רֹאשׁ	הַפִּסְגָּה	אֲשֶׁר	עַל־פְּנֵי	יֶרִיחוֹ	
head	the Pisgah	which	upon face	Jericho	
וַיֵּרָאֵהוּ	יְהוָה	אֶת־כָּל־הָאָרֶץ	אֶת־הַגִּלְעָד	עַד־דָּן	
he showed him	YHWH	(to) all the land	(to) Gilead	until Dan	

Moses ascended from the steppes of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which faces Jericho; YHWH showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan,

Deuteronomy 34:2

וְאֵת	כָּל־נַפְתָּלִי	וְאֵת־אֶרֶץ	אֶפְרַיִם	וּמְנַשֶּׁה	וְאֵת
And (to)	all Naphtali	and (to) land	Ephraim	and Manasseh	and (to)
כָּל־אֶרֶץ	יְהוּדָה	עַד	הַיַּם	הָאֲחֵרֹן	

⁸⁰ “This is a rare, and shocking, use of the verb ‘to die’ in the imperative” (Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 735).

the hindermost	the sea	until	Judah	all land
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and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hindermost sea,

Deuteronomy 34:3

עַד־צֶעַר	הַתְּמָרִים	עִיר	יֶרִיחוֹ	בְּקֻעַת	וְאֶת־הַכֹּכֵר	וְאֶת־הַנֶּגֶב
until Zoar	the date palms	city	Jericho	valley	and (to) the round	and (to) the Negeb

and the Negeb, and the environs of the Valley of Jericho, the city of date palms, as far as Zoar.

Deuteronomy 34:4

אֲשֶׁר	הָאָרֶץ	זֹאת	אֵלָיו	יְהוָה	וַיֹּאמֶר
which	the land	this	to him	YHVH	He said
לְזֶרַעַךְ	לֵאמֹר	וְלִיעֲקֹב	לְיִצְחָק	לְאַבְרָהָם	נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי
to your seed	saying	and to Jacob	to Isaac	to Abraham	I swore
תַּעֲבֹר	לֹא	וְשָׁמָּה	בְּעֵינֶיךָ	הִרְאִיתִיךָ	אֶתְנֶנָּה
you will pass over	no	and there	in your eyes	I let you see it	I will give it

YHVH said to him, “This is the land that I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, ‘To your seed I shall give it.’ I have let you see it with your own eyes, but you shall not cross over there.”

Deuteronomy 34:5

עֶבְד־יְהוָה	מֹשֶׁה	שָׁם	וַיָּמָת
servant YHVH	Moses	there	He died
יְהוָה	עַל־פִּי	מוֹאָב	בְּאֶרֶץ
YHVH	upon the mouth	Moab	in land

Moses, servant of YVHV, died there in the land of Moab, by the mouth of YHVH.

Deuteronomy 34:6

בֵּית	מִוֶּל	מוֹאָב	בְּאֶרֶץ	בְּגִי	אֵתּוֹ	וַיִּקְבֹּר
house of	opposite	Moab	in land	in the valley	him	He buried
הַזֶּה	כִּיּוֹם	עַד	אֶת־קִבְרֹתוֹ	אִישׁ	וְלֹא־יָדַע	פְּעוֹר
this	today	until	(to) his grave	man	and no knows	Peor

He buried him/He was buried⁸¹ in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-Peor; but no man knows his burial site to this day.

Deuteronomy 34:7

בְּמָתוֹ	שָׁנָה	וְעֶשְׂרִים	בֶּן־מֵאָה	וּמֹשֶׁה
in his death	year	and twenty	son one hundred	And Moses

⁸¹ Both translations are possible for this word, and the ambiguity appears intentional. Either God performed this final act of *chesed* for his most faithful servant, or the text is purposefully vague about Moses' burial in order to guard against that site becoming a place of pilgrimage.

לֹחָה	וְלֹא־נָס	עֵינָיו	לֹא־כָהָתָה
his vigor	and no escaped	his eyes	no grown weak

And Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his eyes had not grown weak and his vigor had not fled.

Deuteronomy 34:8

וַיִּבְכּוּ	בְנֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶת־מֹשֶׁה	בְּעֶרְבַת	מֹאָב	שְׁלִשִׁים
They wept	sons	Israel	(to) Moses	in steppes	Moab	thirty
יּוֹם	גִּיתְמּוֹ	יָמֵי	בְכִי	אָבֵל	מֹשֶׁה	
day	they completed	days	weeping	mourning	Moses	

The children of Israel wept for Moses in the steppes of Moab for thirty days; then the days of weeping in mourning for Moses came to an end.

Deuteronomy 34:9

וַיהוֹשֻׁעַ	בֶּן־נֹון	מָלֵא	רוּחַ	חֲכָמָה	כִּי־סָמַךְ	
And Joshua	son of Nun	filled	spirit	wisdom	for laid	
מֹשֶׁה	אֶת־יָדָיו	עָלָיו	וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ	אֵלָיו	בְּנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל	
Moses	(to) his hands	upon him	they listened	to him	sons of Israel	
וַיַּעֲשׂוּ	כַּאֲשֶׁר	צִוָּה	יְהוָה	אֶת־מֹשֶׁה		
they did	that which	he commanded	YHVH	(to) Moses		

And Joshua son of Nun was filled with a spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands upon him, and the children of Israel listened to him and did as YHVH had commanded Moses.

Deuteronomy 34:10

וְלֹא־קָם	נָבִיא	עוֹד	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	כְּמֹשֶׁה		
And no rose	prophet	yet	in Israel	as Moses		
אֲשֶׁר	יָדָעוּ	יְהוָה	פָּנִים	אֶל־פָּנִים		
which	he knew him	YHVH	face	to face		

But no prophet again arose in Israel like Moses, whom YHVH knew face-to-face,

Deuteronomy 34:11

לְכָל־הָאֲתֹת	וְהַמוֹפְתִים	אֲשֶׁר	שָׁלַחַ	יְהוָה	לַעֲשׂוֹת	
to all the signs	and the wonders	which	he sent him	YHVH	to make	
בְּאֶרֶץ	מִצְרַיִם	לְפָרָעָה	וּלְכָל־עַבְדָּיו	וּלְכָל־אֶרְצוֹ		
in land	Egypt	to Pharaoh	and to all his servants	and to all his land		

with all the signs and the wonders that YHVH sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land,

Deuteronomy 34:12

וּלְכָל־	הַיָּד	הַחֲזָקָה	וּלְכָל־	הַמוֹרָא	הַגְּדוֹל	
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the great	the fear	and to all	the strong	the hand	and to all
כָּל־יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְעֵינַי	מֹשֶׁה	עָשָׂה	אֲשֶׁר	
all Israel	to the eyes of	Moses	he did	which	

and with all the strong hand, and with all the great fear that Moses did before the eyes of all Israel.

Translation: Joshua's Death
Joshua 1:1-10, 23:1-24:33

Joshua 1:1

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוָה	עֶבְדִּי	מֹשֶׁה	מוֹת	אַחֲרָי	וַיְהִי
he said	YHVH	servant	Moses	death	after	It was
לֵאמֹר	מֹשֶׁה	מַשְׁרֵת	בֶּן־נֹון	אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	יְהוָה	
saying	Moses	attendant	son of Nun	to Joshua	YHVH	

And it happened after the death of Moses, servant of YHVH, that YHVH spoke to Joshua son of Nun, attendant of Moses, saying,

Joshua 1:2

עָבַר	קוּם	וְעַתָּה	מָת	עַבְדִּי	מֹשֶׁה
cross	arise	and now	he is dead	my servant	Moses
אֶל־הָאָרֶץ	הַזֶּה	וְכָל־הָעָם	אֵתָהּ	הַזֶּה	אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן
to the land	this	and all the people	you	this	(to) the Jordan
יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְבָנַי	לָהֶם	נָתַן	אֲנִי	אֲשֶׁר
Israel	to sons	to them	give	I	which

"Moses My servant is dead. And now arise and cross this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land that I am giving to them, to the children of Israel.

Joshua 1:3

בּוֹ	כָּפִירְגִלְכֶם	תִּדְבֹךְ	אֲשֶׁר	כָּל־מְקוֹם
in it	sole of your food	you will tread	which	Every place
אֶל־מֹשֶׁה	דִּבַּרְתִּי	כְּאֲשֶׁר	נָתַתִּיו	לָכֶם
to Moses	I said	as	I gave it	to you all

"Every place on which the sole of your foot treads, to you I have given it, as I said to Moses.

Joshua 1:4

הַגָּדוֹל	וְעַד־הַנָּהָר	הַזֶּה	וְהַלְבָּנוֹן	מִהַמִּדְבָּר
the great	and until the river	this	and the Lebanon	From the wilderness
וְעַד־הַיָּם	הַחִתִּים	אֶרֶץ	כָּל	נְהַר־פְּרָת
and until the sea	the Hittite	land	all	river Prat (Euphrates), fruitful
גְּבוּלְכֶם	יִהְיֶה	הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ	מְבֹא	הַגָּדוֹל
your border, territory	it will be	the sun	sunset	the great

"From the wilderness and this Lebanon to the Great River, the River Euphrates, the whole land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea where the sun sets, this will be your territory.

Joshua 1:5

יָמֵי	כָּל	לְפָנַיִךְ	אִישׁ	לֹא־יָתִיב
days	all	before you	man	No he will stand

אֶהְיֶה	עִם־מֹשֶׁה	הָיִיתִי	כְּאֲשֶׁר	חַיֶּיךָ
I will be	with Moses	I was	as	your life
אֶעֱזָבְךָ	וְלֹא	אֶרְפֹּךָ	לֹא	עִמָּךְ
I will leave	and no	I will let drop	no	with you

“No man shall stand before you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will not forsake you and I will not abandon you.

Joshua 1:6

אֶת־הָעָם	תִּנְחִילִי	אֹתָהּ	כִּי	וְאַמְץ	חֲזָק
(to) the people	you will give possession	you	for	and be courageous	Be strong
לָהֶם	לִתֵּת	לְאֲבוֹתָם	אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתִּי	אֶת־הָאָרֶץ	הַזֹּאת
to them	to give	to their fathers	which I swore	(to) the land	this

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to possess the land which I swore to their fathers to give to them.

Joshua 1:7

לִשְׁמֹר	מְאֹד	וְאַמְץ	חֲזָק	רַק
to guard	very	and be courageous	be strong	Only
מֹשֶׁה	צִוָּךְ	אֲשֶׁר	כְּכֹל־הַתּוֹרָה	לַעֲשׂוֹת
Moses	he commanded you	which	as all the Torah	to do
וּשְׁמָאוֹל	יְמִין	מִמֶּנּוּ	אֶל־תִּסּוֹר	עַבְדִּי
and left	right	from it	do not depart	my servant
תֵּלֵךְ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּכָל	תִּשְׁכִּיל	לְמַעַן
you will go	which	in all	you will be prudent	for the sake of

“Only, be very strong and courageous to keep and do according to all the Teaching which Moses my servant commanded you, do not deviate from it right or left, that you may prosper everywhere you go.

Joshua 1:8

לֹא־יִמּוּשׁ	סֵפֶרְךָ	הַתּוֹרָה	הַזֹּאת	מִפִּיךָ	וְהִגִּית	בּוֹ
No remove	book	the Torah	this	from your mouth	you will utter	in it
יּוֹמָם	וּלְיָלֵה	לְמַעַן	תִּשְׁמֹר	לַעֲשׂוֹת	כְּכֹל־הַכְּתוּב	
day	and night	for the sake of	you will guard	to do	as all the written	
בָּהּ	כִּי־אִז	תִּצְלִיחַ	אֶת־דְּרָכֶיךָ	וְאִז	תִּשְׁכִּיל	
in it	for so	you will succeed	(to) your paths	and so	you will be prudent	

“This book of Teaching shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall recite it day and night that you may keep to do according to all that is written in it; for then your paths will be successful and then you shall prosper.

Joshua 1:9

הָלֹא	צוֹתִירָךְ	חֲזַק	וְאַמֵּץ	אַל-תַּעֲרָץ
Do not	I commanded you	be strong	and be courageous	do not tremble

וְאַל-תַּחַת	כִּי	עִמָּךְ	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	בְּכָל	אֲשֶׁר	תֵּלֵךְ
and do not be dismayed	for	with you	YHWH	your God	in all	which	you will go

“Have not I commanded you, ‘Be strong and courageous?’ Do not tremble and do not be dismayed, for YHWH your God is with you everywhere you go.”

Joshua 1:10

וַיֹּצֵא	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶת-שֹׁטְרֵי	הָעָם	לֵאמֹר
He commanded	Joshua	(to) officials	the people	saying

Then, Joshua commanded the officials of the people, saying...

Joshua 23:1

וַיְהִי	מִיָּמִים	רַבִּים	אַחֲרָי	אֲשֶׁר-הָנִיחַ	יְהוָה	לְיִשְׂרָאֵל
And it was	from days	many	after	which gave rest	YHWH	to Israel

מְכַל־אִיבֵיהֶם	מִסָּבִיב	וַיְהוֹשֻׁעַ	זָקֵן	בָּא	בַּיָּמִים
from all their enemies	from around	and Joshua	old	he came	in days

And it happened many days after YHWH had granted rest to Israel from all their surrounding enemies, and Joshua had grown old, advanced in days

Joshua 23:2

וַיִּקְרָא	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	לְכָל-יִשְׂרָאֵל	לְזִקְנָיו	וּלְרָאשָׁיו	וּלְשֹׁפְטָיו
He called	Joshua	to all Israel	to its elders	and to its heads	and to its judges

וּלְשֹׁטְרָיו	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲלֵיהֶם	אֲנִי	זָקֵנְתִי	בָּאתִי	בַּיָּמִים
and to its officials	he said	to them	I	I grew old	I came	in days

Joshua called to all Israel, to its elders and to its chieftains, to its judges and to its officials; he said to them, “I have grown old, advanced in days.

Joshua 23:3

וְאַתֶּם	רְאִיתֶם	אֹתָ	כָּל-אֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	יְהוָה
And you all	you saw	(to)	all which	he did	YHWH

אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	לְכָל-הַגּוֹיִם	הָאֵלֶּה	מִפְּנֵיכֶם	כִּי	לְכָם
your God	to all the nations	these	from before you		for

יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	הוּא	הִנֵּלְחָם	לָכֶם
YHWH	your God	he	he fought	for you all

“And you all, you have seen all that YHWH your God did to all these nations before you, for it was YHWH your God who did battle for you.

Joshua 23:4

רָאוּ	הִפְלֵיתִי	לָכֶם	אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם	הַנִּשְׁאָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה
See	I have made fall	to you all	(to) the nations	the remaining	these
בְּנַחְלָה	לְשִׁבְטֵיכֶם	מִן־הַיַּרְדֵּן	וְכָל־הַגּוֹיִם	אֲשֶׁר	
in possession	to your tribes	from the Jordan	and all the nations	which	
הַכָּרְתִּי	וְהַיָּם	הַגָּדוֹל	מִבּוֹא	הַשָּׁמֶשׁ	
I cut off	and the sea	the great	sunset	the sun	

“See, I have made all these remaining nations fall to you in your tribal possessions; and all the nations that I have cut off, from the Jordan and the Great Sea where the sun sets.

Joshua 23:5

וַיְהִי	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	הוא	יִהְדֹּפֶם	מִפְנֵיכֶם	
And YHVH	your God	he	he will push	from before you all	
וְהוֹרִישׁ	אֹתָם	מִלִּפְנֵיכֶם	יִירָשְׁתֶּם	אֶת־אֲרָצָם	
he will dispossess	to them	from before you all	he will dispossess them	(to) their land	
כְּאֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	לָכֶם	
as	he spoke	YHVH	your God	to you all	

“And YHVH your God, He will drive them back from before you and dispossess them from before you, and seize their land as YHVH your God has spoken to you.

Joshua 23:6

וְחִזְקֶתֶם	מְאֹד	לִשְׁמֹר	וְלַעֲשׂוֹת	את	כָּל־הַכְּתוּב	בְּסֵפֶר
And you all be strong	very	to guard	and to do	(to)	all that is written	in book
תּוֹרַת	מֹשֶׁה	לְבִלְתִּי	סוֹר־מִמֶּנּוּ	יְמִין	וּשְׂמָאוֹל	
Torah	Moses	not	deviating from it	right	and left	

“But you must be very strong to keep and do all that is written in the book of the Teaching of Moses, not deviating from it to the right or left,

Joshua 23:7

לְבִלְתִּי־בֹא	בְּגוֹיִם	הָאֵלֶּה	הַנִּשְׁאָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	אֹתְכֶם	
Not come	in the nations	these	the remaining	these	to you all	
וּבִשְׁם	אֱלֹהֵיהֶם	לֹא־תִזְכְּרוּ	וְלֹא	תִשְׁבָּעוּ		
and in name	their gods	no cause to be remembered	and no	you will swear		
וְלֹא	תַעֲבֹדוּם	וְלֹא	תִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ	לָהֶם		
and no	you will serve them	and no	you will bow down	to them		

“such that you do not come among these nations that remain among you. And you shall not invoke the names of their gods or swear by them, and you shall not serve them or bow down to them.

Joshua 23:8

כִּי	אִם־בִּיהֵנָּה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	תִּדְבְּקוּ	כְּאֲשֶׁר	
For	if in YHVH	your God	you cling	as	

עֲשִׂיתֶם	עַד	הַיּוֹם	הַזֶּה
you did	until	today	this

“But to YHVH your God shall you cling, as you have done until this day.

Joshua 23:9

וַיִּרְשׁ	יְהוָה	מִפְּנֵיכֶם	גוֹיִם	גְּדֻלִּים	וַעֲצוּמִים	וְאַתֶּם
He has dispossessed	YHVH	from before you	nations	great	and mighty	and you all
לֹא עָמַד	אִישׁ	בְּפָנֶיכֶם	עַד	הַיּוֹם	הַזֶּה	this
no he stood	man	facing you	until	today		

“YHVH has dispossessed from before you great and mighty nations, and you, no man has withstood you till this day.

Joshua 23:10

אִישׁ־אֶחָד	מִכֶּם	יִרְדֹּף־אֶלֶף	כִּי	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
Man one	from you all	he will pursue one thousand	for	YHVH	your God
הוא	הַנִּלָּחֵם	לָכֶם	כַּאֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר	לָכֶם
He	does battle	to you all	as	he spoke	to you all

“One man from you pursues a thousand, for YHVH your God does battle for you, as He spoke to you.

Joshua 23:11

וְנִשְׁמַרְתֶּם	מְאֹד	לְנַפְשֵׁיכֶם	לְאַהֲבָה	אֶת־יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
You will guard	very	to your souls	to love	(to) YHVH	your God

“You must be very careful, for your own sakes, to love YHVH your God.

Joshua 23:12

כִּי	אִם־שׁוּב	תִּשׁוּבוּ	וּדְבַקְתֶּם	בְּיִתְרִי	הַגּוֹיִם
For	if turn	you turn	you cling	in excess	the nations
הָאֵלֶּה	הַנִּשְׁאָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	אֲתֶכֶם	וְהִתְחַתְּנוּ	you intermarry
these	they remain	these	to you all		
בָּהֶם	וּבְאַתֶּם	בָּהֶם	וְהֵם	בְּכֶם	in you all
in them	you come	in them	and they		

“For if you indeed turn and cling to the remnant of those nations, those that remain among you, and intermarry with them, that you come among them and they among you,

Joshua 23:13

יָדוּעַ	תִּדְעוּ	כִּי	לֹא	יֹסִיף	יְהוָה
know	you will know	for	no	he will add	YHVH
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	לְהוֹרִישׁ	אֶת־הַגּוֹיִם	הָאֵלֶּה	מִלְּפָנֶיכֶם	וְהֵם
your God	to dispossess	(to) the nations	these	from before you	and they will
לָכֶם	לִפְנֵי	וּלְמוֹקֵשׁ	וּלְשֹׁטֵט	בְּצַדִּיכֶם	וּלְצַנְנִים

and to/as thorns	in your sides	and to/as scrouge	and to/as snare	to/as trap	to you all
הַזֹּאת	הַטּוֹבָה	הָאֲדָמָה	מֵעַל	עַד־אֲבִדְכֶם	בְּעֵינֵיכֶם
this	the good	the soil	from upon	until you perish	in your eyes
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	יְהוָה	לָכֶם	נָתַן	אֲשֶׁר	
your God	YHVH	to you all	he gave	which	

“you must surely know that YHVH will no longer dispossess these nations before you; they will become a trap and a snare for you, a scourge against your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good soil that YHVH your God has given you.

Joshua 23:14

וְהִנֵּה	אֲנִי	הוֹלֵךְ	הַיּוֹם	בְּדֶרֶךְ	כָּל־הָאָרֶץ	וַיֵּדַעְתֶּם
And behold	I	I go	today	in path	all the earth	you know
בְּכָל־לִבְבְּכֶם	וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁכֶם	כִּי	לֹא־נִפְלָה	דְּבַר	אֶחָד	מִכָּל
in all your hearts	and in all your souls	for	no fall	word	one	from all
הַדְּבָרִים	הַטּוֹבִים	אֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	עֲלֵיכֶם
the words	the good	which	he spoke	YHVH	your God	upon you all
הַכֹּל	בָּאוּ	לָכֶם	לֹא־נִפְלָה	מִמֶּנּוּ	דְּבַר	אֶחָד
all	they came	to you all	no fall	from them	word	one

“And, behold, I am going today the way of all the earth. You know with all your hearts and all your souls that not one word has failed of all the good words which YHVH your God has spoken to you, each one has come to you and not one word of them has failed.

Joshua 23:15

וְהָיָה	כְּאֲשֶׁר־בָּא	עֲלֵיכֶם	כָּל־הַדְּבַר	הַטּוֹב	אֲשֶׁר	דִּבֶּר
It was	as he came	upon you all	every the word	the good	which	he spoke
יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	אֲלֵיכֶם	כֵּן	יָבִיא	יְהוָה	עֲלֵיכֶם
YHVH	your God	to you all	yes	he will bring	YHVH	upon you all
אֵת	כָּל־הַדְּבַר	הָרָע	עַד־הַשְׁמִידוֹ	אֹתְכֶם	מֵעַל	הָאֲדָמָה
(to)	all the word	the evil	until he destroys	to you all	from upon	the soil
הַטּוֹבָה	הַזֹּאת	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָכֶם	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם
the good	this	which	he gave	to you all	YHVH	your God

“But it may be, just as every good word which YHVH your God has spoken to you has come to you, so too may YHVH bring upon you every evil thing until He destroys you from this good soil which YHVH your God has given to you.

Joshua 23:16

וַיְצַוְכֶם	אֶת־בְּרִית	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵיכֶם	אֲשֶׁר	צִוָּה
In your transgressing	(to) covenant	YHVH	your God	which	he commanded
אֹתְכֶם	וְהִלַּכְתֶּם	וַעֲבַדְתֶּם	אֱלֹהִים	אֲחֵרִים	וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוִיתֶם
to you	you go	you serve	gods	others	you bow down

לָהֶם	וְחָרָה	אֶפְי־יְהוָה	בְּכֶם	וּאֲבַדְתֶּם	מְהֵרָה
to them	it will burn	nose YHVH	in you all	you will perish	quickly
מֵעַל	הָאָרֶץ	הַטּוֹבָה	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן	לָכֶם
from upon	the earth	the good	which	he gave	to you

“In transgressing the covenant of YHVH your God, which He commanded you, going and serving other gods and bowing down to them, the wrath of YHVH will burn against you and you shall perish quickly from upon the good earth that He has given to you.”

Joshua 24:1

וַיִּגְאַסֶּף	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶת־כָּל־שִׁבְטֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	שָׁכְמָה	וַיִּקְרָא	לְזִקְנֵי
He gathered	Joshua	(to) all tribes of	Israel	toward Shechem	he called	to elders
יִשְׂרָאֵל	וְלִרְאשֵׁיוֹ	וְלִשְׁפָטָיו	וְלִשְׁטָרְיוֹ	וַיִּתִּיצְבוּ ⁸²	לִפְנֵי	הָאֱלֹהִים
Israel	and to its chiefs	and to its judges	and to its officials	they stood	before	God

Joshua gathered all the tribes of Israel at Shechem, and he called to the elders of Israel and its chiefs, judges, and officials, and they stationed themselves before God.

Joshua 24:2

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל־כָּל־הָעָם	כֹּה־אָמַר	יְהוָה	
He said	Joshua	to all the people	thus said	YHVH	
אֱלֹהֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בְּעֵבֶר	הַנָּהָר	יֹשְׁבוֹ	
God of	Israel	in region/beyond	the river	they dwelled	
אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	מִעוֹלָם	תֵּרַח	אָבִי	אַבְרָהָם	
your fathers	from forever	Terah	father of	Abraham	
וְאָבִי	נְחוֹר	וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ	אֱלֹהִים	אַחֵרִים	
and father of	Nahor	they served	gods	others	

Joshua said to all the people, “Thus said YHVH God of Israel, ‘Beyond the river your forefathers dwelled long ago, Terah father of Abraham and father of Nahor, and they served other gods.

Joshua 24:3

וָאֲנִי	אֶת־אָבִיכֶם	אֶת־אַבְרָהָם	מֵעֵבֶר	הַנָּהָר	וָאֲנִי	אֶתֹ
I took	(to) your father	(to) Abraham	from beyond	the river	I led	to him
בְּכָל־אֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן	[וְאַרְבֵּה] (וְאָרַב)	אֶת־זַרְעוֹ	וָאֲנִי־לֹ	אֶת־יִצְחָק	
in all earth	Canaan	I made many	(to) his seed	I gave to him	(to) Isaac	

‘I took your forefather Abraham from beyond the river, and I led him to the land of Canaan and multiplied his seed, and I gave him Isaac.

Joshua 24:4

וָאֲנִי	לִי־צִחָק	אֶת־יַעֲקֹב	וָאֲנִי־עָשׂוֹ	וָאֲנִי	לְעֵשָׂו	אֶת־הָרֶ
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⁸² This same verb used when God stations God’s self before Samuel’s sleeping place when God first calls to him in I Samuel 3.

(to) mount	to Esau	I gave	and (to) Esau	(to) Jacob	to Isaac	I gave
מִצְרַיִם	יָרְדוּ	וּבָנָיו	וַיַּעֲקֹב	אֵלָיו	לְרֶשֶׁת	שְׂעִיר
Egypt	they went down	and his sons	and Jacob	to him	as possession	Seir

‘And to Isaac I gave Jacob and Esau; and I gave to Esau the hill country of Seir as his possession, but Jacob and his children went down to Egypt.

Joshua 24:5

וְאֶשְׁלַח	אֶת־מֹשֶׁה	וְאֶת־אַהֲרֹן	וָאֲגִף	אֶת־מִצְרַיִם	כַּאֲשֶׁר
I sent	(to) Moses	and (to) Aaron	I smote	(to) Egypt	as
עֲשִׂיתִי	בְּקִרְבִּי	וְאַחֵר	הוֹצֵאתִי	אֶתְכֶם	you all
I did	in its midst	and after	I freed		

‘Then, I sent Moses and Aaron, and I struck Egypt with that which I did in its midst, and afterward I brought you out.

Joshua 24:6

וְאוֹצִיא	אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	מִמִּצְרַיִם	וַתָּבֹאוּ	הַיָּמָה	וַיִּרְדְּפוּ
I brought out	(to) your fathers	from Egypt	you came	toward the sea	they pursued
מִצְרַיִם	אַחֲרָי	אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם	בְּרֶכֶב	וּבַפָּרָשִׁים	יַם־סוּף
Egyptians	after	your fathers	in chariot	and in warhorses	Sea of Reeds

‘I brought your forebearers out from Egypt, and you came to the sea; the Egyptians pursued your forebearers with chariots and warhorses in the Sea of Reeds.⁸³

Joshua 24:7

וַיִּצְעֲקוּ	אֶל־יְהוָה	וַיִּשֶׂם	מֶאֱפֹל	בֵּינֵיכֶם
They cried out	to YHWH	he put	darkness	between you all
וּבֵין	הַמִּצְרַיִם	וַיָּבֵא	עָלֵיו	אֶת־הַיָּם
and between	the Egyptians	he brought	upon them	(to) the sea
וַיִּכְסֶהוּ	וַתֵּרְאֶינָה	עֵינֵיכֶם	אֶת	אֲשֶׁר־עֲשִׂיתִי
it covered them	you all see	your eyes	(to)	which I did
בְּמִצְרַיִם	וַתִּשְׁבוּ	בַּמִּדְבָּר	יָמִים	רַבִּים
in Egypt	you dwelled	in the wilderness	days	many

‘They cried out to YHWH, who put darkness between you and the Egyptians and brought the sea upon them and it covered them, and your eyes saw that which I did in Egypt; and you dwelled in the wilderness for many days.

Joshua 24:8

[וּבְרִיא] (וּבְאֵבָה)	אֶתְכֶם	אֶל־אֶרֶץ	הָאֲמֹרִי	הַיּוֹשֵׁב	בְּעֵבֶר
I brought	to you all	to land	the Amorites	who dwelled	beyond

⁸³ Note how often God is flipping from forefathers/forebearers to “you all,” combining the experience of the current generation, who largely did not experience the Exodus, with that of their parents.

הִירְדָן	וַיִּלְחֲמוּ	אֲתֶכֶם	וָאֲתָן	אֹתָם
the Jordan	they did battle	to you all	I gave	to them
בְּיָדְכֶם	וַתִּרְשׁוּ	אֶת־אֲרָצָם	וַאֲשִׁמִּידֶם	מִפְּנֵיכֶם
in your hands	you seized	(to) their land	I destroyed	from before you

‘I brought you to the land of the Amorites who dwelled beyond the Jordan, and they did battle against you; I gave them into your hands and you seized their land, and I destroyed them before you.

Joshua 24:9

וַיָּקָם	בַּלַּק	בֶּן־צִפּוֹר	מֶלֶךְ	מֹאָב	וַיִּלְחֶם	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל
He rose	Balak	son of Zippor	king	Moab	he did battle	in Israel
וַיִּשְׁלַח	וַיִּקְרָא	לְבַלְעָם	בֶּן־בְּעוֹר	לְקַלֵּל	אֲתֶכֶם	
he sent	he called	to Balaam	son of Beor	to curse	to you all	

‘Then, Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab, arose and did battle against Israel; he sent and called for Balaam son of Beor to curse you.

Joshua 24:10

וְלֹא	אֲבִיתִי	לִשְׁמַע	לְבַלְעָם	וַיְבָרֵךְ	
And no	I was willing	to listen	to Balaam	he blessed	
בְּרוּךְ	אֲתֶכֶם	וָאֲצִלִּי	אֲתֶכֶם	מִיָּדוֹ	
bless	to you all	I saved	to you all	from his hand	

‘Yet I was not willing to listen to Balaam; he had to bless you, and thus I saved you from his hand.

Joshua 24:11

וַתַּעֲבְרוּ	אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן	וַתָּבֹאוּ	אֶל־יְרִיחוֹ	וַיִּלְחֲמוּ	בְכֶם
You all crossed	(to) the Jordan	you came	to Jericho	they did battle	in you all
בְּעֹלֵי־יְרִיחוֹ	הָאֲמֹרִי	וְהַפְּרִזִּי	וְהַכְּנַעֲנִי	וְהַחִתִּי	
owners of Jericho	the Amorite	and the Perizzite	and the Canaanite	and the Hittite	
וְהַגִּרְגָּשִׁי	הַחִוִּי	וְהַיְבוּסִי	וָאֲתָן	אֹתָם	בְּיָדְכֶם
and the Girschashite	the Hivite	and the Jebusite	I gave	to them	in your hand

‘Then, you crossed the Jordan and came to Jericho, and the lords of Jericho did battle against you, the Amorite and the Perizzite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Girschashite, the Hivite and the Jebusite, but I gave them into your hand.

Joshua 24:12

וָאֲשַׁלַּח	לִפְנֵיכֶם	אֶת־הַצִּרְעָה	וַתִּגְרֹשׁ	אֹתָם	מִפְּנֵיכֶם	שְׁנֵי
I sent	before you all	(to) the hornet	she drove out	to them	from before you all	two
מְלָכֵי	הָאֲמֹרִי	לֹא	בַחֲרֶבְךָ	וְלֹא	בַקֶּשֶׁתְךָ	
kings of	the Amorite	no	in your sword	and no	in your bow	

‘And I sent the hornet before you and it drove them out from before you, the two Amorite kings, not by your sword and not by your bow.

Joshua 24:13

וְאֶתֶּן	לָכֶם	אֶרֶץ	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא־יִגְעַת	בָּהּ
I gave	to you all	earth	which	no you toiled	in her
וְעִירִים	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא־בִנִיתֶם	וּתְשָׁבוּ	בָּהֶם	כְּרָמִים
and cities	which	no you built	you all dwelled	in them	vineyards
וְזֵיתִים	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא־נִטְעַתֶם	אַתֶּם	אֲכָלִים	
and olives	which	no you planted	you all	they eat	

‘I gave to you a land in which you did not toil and cities which you did not build, and you dwelled in them; vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant you are eating.’

Joshua 24:14

וְעַתָּה	יִרְאוּ	אֶת־יְהוָה	וְעָבְדוּ	אֹתוֹ	בְּתָמִים
And now	fear	(to) YHVH	and serve	to him	in complete
וּבִאֱמֻנָה	וְהִסִּירוּ	אֶת־אֱלֹהִים	אֲשֶׁר	עָבְדוּ	אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם
and in truth	and turn aside	to gods	which	they served	your fathers
בְּעֵבֶר	הַנָּהָר	וּבְמִצְרַיִם	וְעָבְדוּ	אֶת־יְהוָה	
in beyond	the river	and in Egypt	and serve	(to) YHVH	

“And now, fear YHVH and serve Him in wholeness and in truth; put away the gods that your forebearers served beyond the river and in Egypt, and serve YHVH.

Joshua 24:15

וְאִם	רָע	בְּעֵינֵיכֶם	לְעָבֹד	אֶת־יְהוָה	בְּחַרּוּ	לָכֶם
And if	evil	in your eyes	to serve	(to) YHVH	choose	to you all
הַיּוֹם	אֶת־מִי	תַּעֲבֹדוּן	אִם	אֶת־אֱלֹהִים	אֲשֶׁר־עָבְדוּ	אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם
today	(to) who	you would serve	if	(to) gods	which they served	your fathers
אֲשֶׁר	[מֵעֵבֶר] (בְּעֵבֶר)	הַנָּהָר	וְאִם	אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי	הָאֲמֹרִי	אֲשֶׁר
which	from beyond	the river	and if	(to) gods of	the Amorite	which
אַתֶּם	יֹשְׁבִים	בְּאֶרְצָם	וְאֲנִי	וּבֵיתִי	נִעֲבֹד	אֶת־יְהוָה
to them	they dwell	in their land	and I	and my house	we will serve	(to) YHVH

“And if it is evil in your eyes to serve YHVH, choose today whom you would serve, if it be the gods that your forebearers served beyond the river or if it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell; but I and my house will serve YHVH.”

Joshua 24:16

וַיַּעַן	הָעָם	וַיֹּאמֶר	חֲלִילָה	לָנוּ	
He answered	the people	he said	far be it	to us	
מֵעֵזָב	אֶת־יְהוָה	לְעָבֹד	אֱלֹהִים	אַחֲרָיִם	

others	gods	to serve	(to) YHVH	forsake
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The people answered and said, “Far be it from us to forsake YHVH to serve other gods!

Joshua 24:17

כִּי	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵינוּ	הוּא	הַמַּעֲלֶה	אֶתֵּנוּ	וְאֶת־אֲבוֹתֵינוּ
For	YHVH	our God	he	who brought up	to us	and to our fathers
מֵאֶרֶץ	מִצְרַיִם	מִבֵּית	עֲבָדִים	וְאֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	לְעֵינֵינוּ
from land	Egypt	from house	slaves	and which	he did	to our eyes
אֶת־הַאֲתוֹת	הַגְּדוֹלוֹת	הָאֵלֶּה	נִישְׁמָרְנוּ	בְּכָל־הַדֶּרֶךְ	אֲשֶׁר	הֵלַכְנוּ
(to) the signs	the greats	these	he guarded us	in all the way	which	we walked
בָּהּ	וּבְכָל־	הָעַמִּים	אֲשֶׁר	עָבְרָנוּ	בְּקִרְבָּם	
in her	and in all	the peoples	which	we passed through	in their midst	

“For YHVH our God, it is He who brought us and our forebearers up from the land of Egypt, from the house of slaves, who produced before our eyes these great signs, and guarded us on all the way that we have walked and among all the peoples through whose midst we have passed.

Joshua 24:18

וַיִּגְרֹשׁ	יְהוָה	אֶת־כָּל־הָעַמִּים	וְאֶת־הָאֲמֹרִי	יָשָׁב	הָאָרֶץ
He drive out	YHVH	(to) all the peoples	and to the Amorite	dwelt	the land
מִפְּנֵינוּ	גַּם־אֲנַחְנוּ	נַעֲבֹד	אֶת־יְהוָה	כִּי־הוּא	אֱלֹהֵינוּ
from before us	also we	we will serve	(to) YHVH	for He	our God

“YHVH drove out from before us all the peoples, the Amorites, inhabitants of the land; we, too, will serve YHVH for He is our God.”

Joshua 24:19

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל־הָעָם	לֹא	תוּכְלוּ
He said	Joshua	to the people	no	you will not be able
לְעַבֹד	אֶת־יְהוָה	כִּי־אֱלֹהִים	קְדוֹשִׁים	הוּא
to serve	(to) YHVH	for God	holy	he
אֵל־קִנּוּא	הוּא	לֹא־יִשָּׂא	לְפִשְׁעֵכֶם	וּלְחַטְאוֹתֵיכֶם
God jealous	he	no he will bear up	to your transgression	and to your sins

Joshua said to the people, “You will not be able to serve YHVH, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God, He will not sweep away your transgressions or your sins.

Joshua 24:20

כִּי	תַעֲזֹבוּ	אֶת־יְהוָה	וְעַבַּדְתֶּם	אֱלֹהֵי	נָכָר	וְשָׁב
For	you will forsake	(to) YHVH	and you will serve	gods	foreign	he will turn back
וְהָרַע	לָכֶם	וְכָל־הָ	אֲתָכֶם	אֲחֵרֵי	אֲשֶׁר־הָיָה	לָכֶם
he will be bad	to you all	he will end	to you all	after	which he was good	to you all

“For should you forsake YHVH and serve alien gods, He shall turn back and be bad to you and put an end to you after having been good to you.”

Joshua 24:21

נַעֲבֹד	אֶת־יְהוָה	כִּי	לֹא	אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	הָעָם	וַיֹּאמֶר
we will serve	(to) YHVH	for	no	to Joshua	the people	He said

But the people said to Joshua, “No, for we will serve YHVH.”

Joshua 24:22

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל־הָעָם	עֵדִים	אַתֶּם	בְּכֶם	כִּי־אַתֶּם
He said	Joshua	to the people	witnesses	you all	in you all	for you all
בְּחַרְתֶּם	לָכֶם	אֶת־יְהוָה	לְעַבְדּוֹ	אוֹתוֹ	וַיֹּאמְרוּ	עֵדִים
you all chose	to you all	(to) YHVH	to serve	to him	they said	witnesses

So, Joshua said to the people, “You are witnesses against yourselves, for you chose for yourselves YHVH, to serve Him.” And they said, “We are witnesses.”

Joshua 24:23

וְעַתָּה	הִסִּירוּ	אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי	הַנֹּכַר	אֲשֶׁר	בְּקִרְבְּכֶם
And now	turn aside	(to) gods	the foreign	which	in your midst
וְהִטּוּ	אֶת־לְבַבְכֶּם	אֶל־יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
and extend	(to) your hearts	to YHVH	God of	Israel	

“And now, put away the alien gods that are in your midst; incline your hearts to YHVH, God of Israel.”

Joshua 24:24

וַיֹּאמְרוּ	הָעָם	אֶל־יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶת־יְהוָה
They said	the people	to Joshua	(to) YHVH
אֱלֹהֵינוּ	נַעֲבֹד	וּבְקוֹלוֹ	נִשְׁמָע
our God	we will serve	and in his voice	we will listen

The people said to Joshua, “YHVH our God we will serve, and His voice we will obey.”

Joshua 24:25

וַיַּכְרֵת	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	בְּרִית	לָעָם	בַּיּוֹם	הַהוּא
He cut	Joshua	covenant	to the people	on the day	that
וַיָּשֶׂם	לּוֹ	חֻק	וּמִשְׁפָּט	בְּשֶׁחֶם	
he set	to him	statute	and law	in Shechem	

Joshua cut a covenant for the people on that day; he set for them a statute and law at Shechem.

Joshua 24:26

וַיִּכְתֹּב	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶת־הַדְּבָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	בְּסֵפֶר	תּוֹרַת
He wrote	Joshua	(to) the words	these	in book	teaching of

שם	וַיִּקְיָמָהּ	גְּדוֹלָהּ	אֶבֶן	וַיִּקַּח	אֱלֹהִים
there	he rose it up	great	stone	he took	God
יְהוָה	בְּמִקְדָּשׁ	אֲשֶׁר	הָאֵלֶּה	תַּחַת	
YHVH	in sacred place	which	the oak/terebinth	under	

Then, Joshua wrote these things in a book of God's teaching, and he took a great stone and erected it there, under the oak which is in a sacred precinct of YHVH.

Joshua 24:27

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם	הִנֵּה	הָאֶבֶן	הַזֹּאת	תְּהִי־בָנוּ
He said	Joshua	to all the people	behold	the stone	this	will be in us
לְעֵדָה	כִּי־קִיָּא	שָׁמְעָה	אֵת	כָּל־אִמְרֵי	יְהוָה	אֲשֶׁר
as witness	for she	she heard	(to)	all speech	YHVH	which
דִּבֶּר	עִמָּנוּ	וְהִיְתָה	בְּכֶם	לְעֵדָה	פֶּן־תִּכְחָשׁוּן	בְּאֵלֵיכֶם
he spoke	with us	and she will be	in you all	as witness	lest you deceive	in your God

Joshua said to all the people, "Behold, this stone shall be as a witness against us, for it heard all the words which YHVH spoke toward us; it shall be as a witness against you, lest you deceive your God."

Joshua 24:28

וַיִּשְׁלַח	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	אֶת־הָעָם	אִישׁ	לְנַחֲלָתוֹ
He sent	Joshua	(to) the people	man	to his possession

Then, Joshua sent away the people, each man to his holding.

Joshua 24:29

וַיְהִי	אַחֲרָיו	הַדְּבָרִים	הָאֵלֶּה	וַיָּמָת	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
It was	after	the things	these	he died	Joshua
בֶּן־נֹון	עֶבֶד	יְהוָה	בֶּן־מֵאָה	וְעֶשְׂרִי	שָׁנִים
son of Nun	servant	YHVH	son one hundred	and ten	years

It happened after these things that Joshua son of Nun, servant of YHVH, died; he was one hundred and ten years old.

Joshua 24:30

וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	אֹתוֹ	בְּגִבּוֹל	נַחֲלָתוֹ	בְּתִמְנַת־סֶרַח
They buried	to him	in boundary	his possession	in Timnath-Serah
אֲשֶׁר	בְּהַר־אֶפְרַיִם	מִצְפּוֹן	לְהַר־גַּעַשׁ	
which	in mountain Ephraim	from north	to mountain Gaash	

They buried him in the territory of his holding in Timnath-Serah, which is in the hill country of Ephraim north of Mount Gaash.

Joshua 24:31

וַיַּעֲבֹד	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶת־יְהוָה	כָּל	יְמֵי	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ
He served	Israel	(to) YHVH	all	days of	Joshua

וְכָל	יְמֵי	הַזְקֵנִים	אֲשֶׁר	הֶאָרְכוּ	יָמִים
and all	days of	the elders	which	were lengthened	days
אַחֲרָיו	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	וְאֲשֶׁר	יָדְעוּ	אֶת	
after	Joshua	and which	they knew	(to)	
כָּל־מַעֲשֵׂה	יְהוָה	אֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	לְיִשְׂרָאֵל	
all deeds	YHVH	which	he did	to Israel	

Israel served YHVH all the days of Joshua and all the days of the elders who lived on after Joshua, and who had known all the deeds which YHVH had produced for Israel.

Joshua 24:32

וְאֶת־עַצְמוֹת	יֹסֵף	אֲשֶׁר־הֶעֱלוּ	בְנֵי־יִשְׂרָאֵל	מִמִּצְרָיִם	
And to bones	Joseph	which they brought up	sons of Israel	from Egypt	
קָבְרוּ	בְּשֶׁחֶם	בְּחֶלְקָת	הַשָּׂדֶה	אֲשֶׁר	
they buried	in Shechem	in portion	the field	which	
קָנָה	יַעֲקֹב	מֵאֵת	בְּנֵי־חָמוֹר	אָבִי־שֶׁחֶם	
he bought	Jacob	from	sons of Hamor	father of Shechem	
בְּמֵאָה	קֶשֶׁטָה	וַיְהִי	לְבְנֵי־יוֹסֵף	לְנַחֲלָה	
in one hundred	<i>keshitah</i>	it became	to sons of Joseph	as possession	

And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up from Egypt, they buried in Shechem in the portion of the field that Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor, Shechem's father, for one hundred *keshitah*, so that it became a holding of the sons of Joseph.

Joshua 24:33

וְאֶלְעָזָר	בֶּן־אַהֲרֹן	מָת	וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	אֵלָיו	בְּגִבְעַת
And Eleazar	son of Aaron	died	they buried	to him	in hill of
פִּינָחָס	בְּנוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	נָתַן־לּוֹ	בְּהָר	אֶפְרַיִם
Phineas	his son	which	he gave him	in mountain	Ephraim

And Eleazar son of Aaron died, and they buried him on the hill of Phineas his son, which had been given to him in the hill country of Ephraim.

CHAPTER THREE**Co-Creating a Legacy for Those Gone Too Soon:****The Earnest Yet Flawed Responses of Loved Ones**Introduction

Although death may come for us all, it does not come in the same way or at the same stage of life. It is sad to lose an elderly loved one, but those left behind often talk about that person leading “a long and happy life.” In general, the longer a person lives and the more standard their cause of death, the less tragic their passing becomes; this is not to say their mourners do not feel sad, but they are also comforted that the deceased received the blessings of longevity and predictability. The opposite is true for people who die at a young age, in violent or unexpected ways; their mourners are left with feelings of devastation, confusion, anger, and hopelessness. The world no longer seems ordered or just, and they must grieve their sense of stability and their loved one’s potential in addition to the person themselves. These types of deaths make friends and clergy people tongue-tied, and they often upend the lives of those close to the deceased. They cause even the skeptics among us to superstitiously say “God forbid” or “tfu tfu tfu” when talking about the loss, lest such misfortune befall us too. Rather than shy away from such deaths, though, the Tanach contains several stories of people cut down in their prime. In addition to the reassurance these texts can provide by showing some mourners that their hardships are not too marginal or too daunting to be reflected in our canon, they can also teach us all lessons about how to respond to such tragedies.

In this chapter, I will examine the untimely deaths of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan. The word “untimely” presents a theological problem, because depending on one’s conception of God or fate, there might be no such thing as an early death. Still, whatever your beliefs, when a person dies during their years of prime health and productivity, it is a loss at an inopportune or illogical moment. Rachel, Er, and Jonathan all die suddenly and at the peak of their abilities, when we would expect

them to be building up prosperous homes. While Rachel is well known as a matriarch of the Jewish people and Jonathan is a prominent figure in the story of King David, Er is less familiar to many readers. Er was the son of Judah and grandson of the patriarch Jacob, and his death as a childless man introduces difficult questions that play out not only in Genesis 38, but also reappear in several books of the Tanach.¹ Rachel, Er, and Jonathan do not reach the age and contemplative stage of those figures considered in the first two chapters of this thesis, and as a result they do not articulate a clear and specific vision for their own legacies. Instead, all three leave behind loved ones and dependents who must mourn them and co-create their legacies. These relatives and friends try to honor the deeds and significance of the deceased, but they also contend with practical concerns. Because the results are messy and imperfect, and because many of the customs observed are foreign to modern readers, it is easy to approach these scenes with a sense of disappointment or judgment. Still, I would encourage readers to extend to these figures a measure of the sympathy they would give to mourners they know today. From the earnest but flawed responses of the biblical bereaved, contemporary readers can draw both comfort and guidance for our own times.

Story Outlines

Rachel

The death of Rachel is unique in that it is just one scene in a larger chapter that feels quite disjointed, reading like a series of loosely related vignettes. Genesis 35 is a chapter of journeying, in which Jacob travels to several locations before returning to the place of his birth, experiencing both affirmation and loss along the way. On the positive side, Jacob communicates directly with God, he

¹ As is the case for many figures in the Tanach, Er's name may carry significance. His childlessness is such a key feature of his identity in this story that a midrash and Targum Jonathan both connect Er to the Hebrew *ariri*, meaning childless. (Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2001), footnote 3 on Genesis 38.

receives blessings, and he builds altars in response. Additionally, the text lists all of Jacob's sons, demonstrating that the promise of progeny has been fulfilled. Still, in this same chapter Jacob loses three people, and his eldest son sleeps with his maidservant. While it is possible to see these all as separate stories, brought together simply because they unfolded in a period of transition, I think there is a more significant message here. Jacob is assured and authoritative in this chapter, cleansing his household of alien gods,² inspiring fear in the surrounding cities,³ and erecting monuments to his God.⁴ But no matter how many blessings he secures and how much power he exerts over others, Jacob learns that he is not insulated from life's misfortunes and does not possess ultimate power. Every single person, however high they rise, is still essentially and inescapably human. This lesson is driven home most powerfully by Rachel's passing because she is Jacob's beloved and is bearing his child, but neither of those facts protect her from an early death. Unfortunately, this is not the only time a male figure feels his limitations and vulnerability due to a woman being jeopardized or harmed. It also occurs when both Abraham and Isaac lie about their wives being sisters, putting Sarah and Rebekah in a position to be raped by foreign kings. The same is also true when Bathsheba loses her first husband and infant due to David's sexual impropriety and moral failings. Neither forefather nor king are invincible, and the women in their lives are subjected to danger and pain reinforcing that reality.

Reading Rachel's death in context is not only about observing how she is part of Jacob's learning, but also how the surrounding verses add depth to her story. The most relevant vignettes in this regard are the other two deaths in Genesis 35, those of Deborah and Isaac. Deborah's death and burial are relayed in just one verse: "Then, Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died and was buried below Bethel under the oak, and its name was called Allon-Bacuth (Weeping Oak)" (Genesis 35:8).

² Genesis 35:2, 4

³ Genesis 35:5

⁴ Genesis 35:7, 14

This is a much more efficient and terse death scene than the five verses afforded Rachel, but it highlights two important elements missing in Genesis 35:16-20. First, Deborah is identified as Rebekah's nurse, which is not just a professional role but also a lifelong caring connection. Rachel is not called Jacob's wife or her newborn's mother, even though Jacob is called אביו/his father (Genesis 35:18). I would be inclined to read a woman presented without any epithets as a positive sign of independence elsewhere, but in this instance, it conveys coldness, seeing as it is paired with Rachel being buried separately and her act of naming overruled. She appears severed from the family in preparation for her distant burial. Second, while the text does not say explicitly that people wept for Deborah, by naming her grave site Weeping Oak, the text implies that there was an expression of great sadness when she died. In contrast, neither the act of burying Rachel nor the name of her gravesite let us know about Jacob's emotional state, or that of anyone else in the household. When Isaac dies just a few verses later, Rachel's youth and isolated burial sting that much more. We are told not only that Isaac dies at age 180, but also that he was "זקן ושבע ימים" old and sated with days," not only that he was buried properly, "ואֶלְעֵזָרָה גָּתְּרוּ לְעַמּוּנָה" gathered to his people," but also that his sons reunited to accomplish that task (Genesis 35:28-9). When compared with one another, the stories that surround Rachel's death highlight several significant gaps and deficiencies in the way she was treated.

Having analyzed the broader context, we can now turn to the five verses that describe Rachel's death and burial, Genesis 35:16-20. Genesis 35:16 spends more than twice as long describing the household's journey compared to Rachel's hard labor, nine Hebrew words for the former and four for the latter. This focus on travel prepares a close reader for Rachel's otherwise unexpected burial site, on the road rather than in the Cave of Machpelah. The following verse contains the only direct quote recorded in this episode, and it is not between husband and wife or other family members, but from the midwife to Rachel. She says, "Do not fear, for this one, too, is a

son for you” (Genesis 35:17). This statement can be read in multiple ways because Rachel is both seen and erased all at once. On the one hand, Rachel has been yearning for children her entire marriage; she even wished for another son when she named her firstborn, "וַתִּקְרָא אֶת־שְׁמוֹ יוֹסֵף" (Genesis 30:20). She called his name Joseph saying, "May YHWH add another son for me" (Genesis 30:24). The midwife may be saying a profoundly reassuring thing to Rachel, demonstrating a deep understanding of who she is and what she cares about most. On the other hand, Rachel's pain and even her own body become secondary to the baby she is birthing. In diminishing her individuality, the text may be paving the way for her isolated burial. The renaming of Rachel's son that occurs in verse 18 is something we will return to in a future section in greater detail, but suffice to say here that a real dilemma arises over the last wishes of a dying mother and the wellbeing of her son. However one ultimately judges Jacob's renaming of the child, this is another example of Rachel being minimized as she approaches death. Her burial on the road and the pillar erected to mark the spot will also be discussed in upcoming sections, but it is worth stating from the outset that this gravesite was not a foregone conclusion. Scholars calculate that Jacob found himself roughly twenty miles from the Cave of Machpelah and note that other deceased Israelites were transported greater distances to be interred at family gravesites, so Rachel's burial deserves questioning and even criticism.⁵ Such judgment is expressed directly in the text as Jacob shares his regret years later on his deathbed, a topic that will also be explored in this chapter.

As a final note, Rachel reappears in Jeremiah as a transcendent figure. The weeping never recorded or even alluded to at the time of her death is finally expressed, but it comes from Rachel herself due to the plight of her descendants. "A voice is heard in Ramah/Wailing, bitter weeping./Rachel weeps over her children,/She refuses to be consoled over her children,/For they are no more" (Jeremiah 31:15). Rachel has been transformed from the mother of two sons to the

⁵ Benjamin D. Cox and Susan Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 128, no. 1 (2009): 136.

mother of all Israel, exponentially increasing the reassurance her midwife tried to provide. Rachel's tragic story resonates with the Israelites. She was separated from her loved ones, and they are separated from their land; both matriarch and progeny find themselves unexpectedly in pain and deeply wronged. By imagining that YHVH consoles Rachel, Jeremiah provides comfort not just to her but also to his own struggling generation. In creating a legacy for Rachel, the Israelites flip her story on its head while simultaneously preserving the essence of who she was; she becomes the mourner not the mourned, the accompanier rather than the one left behind, all while her role as mother is amplified and elevated.

Er

The death of Er presents a specific challenge missing from the other two stories considered in this thesis chapter because he dies without producing an heir. First, this is a problem for Er because, "If a man, after having contracted a marriage, dies without sons, then he dies entirely."⁶ Such a man is threatened by total erasure because his name may be forgotten, ancestral rites will not be observed for him by future generations, and his holdings will be dispersed. These forms of discontinuity and disappearance are disturbing to his family, both because they add to the grief over the deceased himself, and because they raise existential doubts about their own longevity and permanence. Second, Er's death as a childless man presents a problem for his widow, Tamar, whose connection to Er's family and economic security depend on producing a male heir. When she takes extreme measures to have a son, we do not know "whether Tamar acts to preserve her husband's name and lineage, to preserve her connection to Judah's family, or simply to secure for herself a

⁶ Steffan Mathias, "How a Law about Sex Became about Anything Else," in *Paternity, Progeny, and Perpetuation: Creating Lives after Death in the Hebrew Bible* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020), 29.

child and a future.”⁷ However, it seems likely that all three concerns serve as motivation for her unorthodox behavior to some degree.

Having laid out the context and stakes involved in this story, we can now turn to summarizing the text itself. Genesis 38 opens with Judah separating from his brothers and starting his own family. He takes a Canaanite wife⁸ who bears him three sons in three consecutive verses.⁹ Two notes about naming here: Judah’s wife is not named in the text and is merely identified as the daughter of Shua, and Judah names his firstborn son while his wife names the other two. These facts hint at broader themes in the story, first that women are expected to pass from father to husband, and second that fathers are most invested in their oldest sons who are meant to carry on the family line.¹⁰ When things go awry, with Tamar put in limbo between her father’s and husband’s households and Er struck down so early, each figure must navigate a world of upended norms. Er’s untimely demise is not explained in detail, as the text simply states, “But Er, Judah’s firstborn, was evil in the eyes of YHVH, so YHVH put him to death” (Genesis 38:7). Readers are told that Onan, too, is evil in the eyes of YHVH, but this time we are given more information. In the wake of Er’s death, Judah instructs Onan, “Come into your brother’s wife and do your duty as brother-in-law to her, and raise up seed for your brother” (Genesis 38:8). Interestingly, Judah’s order focuses first on Tamar’s needs and second what is owed to Er. Onan practices coitus interruptus because he does not want to give seed to his brother, which would threaten his own property interests; he rejects his duty to Er and does not even think about his obligation to Tamar. As a result, Onan is struck down, Judah is

⁷ Dvora E. Weisberg, “The Widow of Our Discontent: Levirate Marriage in the Bible and Ancient Israel,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 28, no. 4 (2004): 414.

⁸ In Genesis 38:2 he takes a woman, and this appears to be a proper marriage because the text refers to her father whose consent he would need before coming into her, the use of the verb נָקַח is elsewhere used for marriage, and later in verse 12 she is explicitly called Judah’s wife.

⁹ Genesis 38:3-5

¹⁰ The relative investment in each son decreases on Judah’s part. He names Er, his wife names Onan, and then not only does she name Shelah, but the text indicates that Judah was not nearby when Shelah was born.

bereaved of two sons in quick succession, and Tamar is still in a precarious situation. Judah must protect his one remaining child for the sake of his own line, and the daughter-in-law whose needs he once prioritized suddenly seems threatening in light of two tragic deaths for which he lacks explanations. His suspicion of Tamar and need to guard Shelah grow in concert, paving the way toward reckless and unjust actions on his part.

After Onan dies, Judah mistreats Tamar in several ways, efficiently captured in one troubling verse. “Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, ‘Stay a widow in your father’s house until Shelah my son grows,’ for he said [to himself], ‘Lest he, too, will die like his brothers.’ So, Tamar went and stayed in her father’s house” (Genesis 38:11). This verse opens by highlighting Judah and Tamar’s relationship as father- and daughter-in-law, a bond where he can expect deference in exchange for offering protection. But by ordering her to return to her father’s home, Judah does not uphold his end of the bargain, relying on another man’s resources without releasing Tamar from his control.¹¹ Even worse, readers are told that Judah is lying from the outset, so Tamar’s initial obedience would doom her to be a childless widow caught between her family of origin and her husband’s family forever. When Tamar realizes the terrible situation she has been put in, she resorts to unconventional measures to right these wrongs, and in Genesis 38:14-19 the deceived becomes the deceiver. Despite dressing as a whore and laying with her father-in-law, readers are meant to view Tamar’s actions favorably; we are told at the outset of Judah’s mendacity, reassured of Tamar’s just motives, and, because God was seen as the arbiter of fertility in the Tanach,¹² her immediate conception is a sign of Divine approval.

¹¹ Susan Niditch, “The Wronged Woman Righted: An Analysis of Genesis 38,” *The Harvard Theological Review* 72, no. 1/2 (1979): 146.

¹² See also the stories of Sarah, Leah, Rachel, and Chana, their struggles with barrenness and their interactions with God, Divine messengers, prayer, and priests in the journey toward childbearing.

As Tamar ascends, Judah descends even further in our estimation, and in Genesis 38:20-23 he transforms from an authoritative and virile figure to a baffled and impotent one. Pathetically, he is more afraid of becoming a laughingstock for visiting a prostitute than he is of societal or Divine judgment for the way he treats Tamar. His total disregard for her becomes clear when, in response to her pregnancy and presumed infidelity, he says, “Bring her out to be burned” (Genesis 38:25). That he is so quick to call for Tamar’s death, so confident she will be surrendered by her father’s house, and so ready to impose an unheard-of punishment¹³ all demonstrate Judah’s entitlement. Narratively, he is perfectly set up to learn the hard lesson Tamar is prepared to teach. When she reveals the truth to him, he finally recognizes¹⁴ his error, declaring, “She is more righteous than I, for I have not given her to Shelah my son” (Genesis 38:26). The restoration of their non-sexual relationship and the birth of twins reinforce Tamar’s honor and righteousness.

In summarizing this saga, one notices that Er largely disappears and his relatives take center stage. Concern about Er’s name being erased becomes secondary to the threat of Judah’s line ending, and his need to protect Shelah becomes the driving force behind his actions. Surprisingly, though, even when Tamar conceives, the children she bears are not accorded to Er. The genealogy presented when Jacob’s family goes down to Egypt states, “וּבְנֵי יְהוּדָה עֵר וְאוֹנָן וְשִׁלָּה וְפֶרֶץ וְזָרַח וַיָּמָת”¹⁵ And the sons of Judah were Er and Onan and Shelah and Perez and Zerach, but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan, and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul” (Genesis 46:12).¹⁵ Neither Er nor Onan are lost to the historical record, but the sons intended for Er are counted for Judah. Additionally, his lineage appears to be continued through

¹³ Alexander Izuchukwu Abasili, “Genesis 38: The Search for Progeny and Heir,” *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* 25, no. 2 (2011): 285.

¹⁴ The same dynamic of a character urging “הִכְרֵזָה” recognize, please” and the following verse beginning with “He recognized” is what happened in Genesis 37:32-33, when Judah helped to dupe his father into believing Joseph was killed. (Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 2-9.

¹⁵ See also Numbers 26:20-22 and I Chronicles 2:4.

Perez, the firstborn of his mother Tamar, rather than Shelah, the eldest surviving son. Both of these facts may be evidence of an effort to address the difficulties that levirate marriage causes for male relatives of the deceased. Dvora Weisberg shows that the passages in the Tanach dealing with *yibbum* all express a sense of discomfort with the practice.¹⁶ For example, even when levirate marriage is established as law apodictically in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, it is immediately followed by a ritual that allows the brother to shirk his responsibility. By listing Perez and Zerach as sons of Judah, or Obed as the son of Boaz in the Book of Ruth,¹⁷ the text provides assurance to men who do the right thing that their parentage will be recognized. Still, there are sanctioned paths to get out of this obligation, and even when it is fulfilled it may not meet its intended goal of giving seed to the deceased. The solution offered for a man who dies childless like Er is imperfect, as are the people entrusted with its implementation. We will return to the ways their shortcomings and competing interests warp the mourning and legacy-creating processes in sections to come.

Jonathan

Just as with Rachel and Er, is it important for readers to know the context of Jonathan's death before examining the story itself. Jonathan dies in battle alongside his father and brothers. His death is prophesied when the Necromancer at Endor raises Samuel's spirit, who says to Saul, "וּמָחָר וּבְנֶיךָ עִמִּי אֶתָּה and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me" (I Samuel 28:19), meaning they will all perish. Just because Jonathan's death was predicted, however, does not mean that it was predictable. Only a few chapters earlier, Jonathan proved himself an extremely capable warrior, slaying roughly twenty men and sending an entire army into disarray. Not only that, but the enemies

¹⁶ Weisberg, "The Widow of Our Discontent," 403.

¹⁷ Ruth 4:21

he killed were Philistines, and he did so while declaring resolute faith in God.¹⁸ For Jonathan to fall quite unremarkably at the hands of this same enemy, seemingly abandoned by the Divine, is surprising. In addition, that Jonathan went to war alongside his father was not a given considering the prior deterioration of their relationship. Jonathan feels committed to David, his father's rival, from the moment they meet;¹⁹ he demonstrates a subservience to him²⁰ that angers Saul and leads to harsh rebuke.²¹ Like his sister Michal, Jonathan helps David escape from Saul's wrath, demonstrating that his loyalty to this beloved friend outweighs his commitment to his father. Despite the humiliation and berating Jonathan experienced at the hands of Saul, he nevertheless stands and falls with him in battle.

Unlike Rachel and Er, Jonathan actively participates in crafting part of his legacy. He does not follow in the footsteps of Jacob or Moses, describing his desired burial or offering instruction to his descendants, but he works to ensure the safety of his children and thus the continuation of his line. This foresight is particularly important because Saul's other relatives, who pose a threat to David's power, are killed off. In I Samuel 20, Jonathan makes a pact with David, exchanging intel on King Saul's murderous intentions for ongoing protection of his own house. As much as this agreement may be rooted in Jonathan's affection for David, it is also informed by self-interest. He makes the pact in an open field rather than a secluded space, increasing the odds that it will be honored;²² he invokes God six times in the initial pact and three times in its abbreviated reiterations, increasing its gravity;²³ he also repeats עַד-עוֹלָם to emphasize that the pact should be binding on all future generations.²⁴ The importance of protecting his offspring most obviously benefits Jonathan,

¹⁸ I Samuel 14:1-14

¹⁹ I Samuel 18:1

²⁰ I Samuel 18:3-4

²¹ I Samuel 20:30

²² I Samuel 20:11

²³ I Samuel 20:12-16, 23, 42

²⁴ I Samuel 20:15, 23, 42

but it also ends up providing David with an important way to honor his closest friend. David must grieve Jonathan in conjunction with his rival Saul, and do so in a way that allays concerns that he was part of the king's demise, so having a concrete and distinct way to mourn Jonathan may have been a relief.

Turning now to the scene of Jonathan's death, it is remarkable how much his story is intertwined with and then subsumed by that of his father Saul. After establishing that the Israelites were fighting a losing battle, the text states, "The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, sons of Saul" (I Samuel 31:2). This is the only verse in the chapter in which Jonathan is named explicitly, and even here his stature is undermined; twice he is referred to as Saul's son, he is grouped with his brothers, and there are no details about how such a valiant warrior was slain. In verses 6, 7, 8, and 12, Jonathan is only referred to as one of Saul's sons, emphasizing the total defeat of his father while erasing Jonathan as a distinct and significant figure in his own right. This humiliation continues in excruciating detail for Saul and his three sons after death, when their corpses are discovered by the Philistines, Saul is decapitated and impaled, and then they are all burned.²⁵ It is only in the next chapter and book, when the focus shifts away from this brutality and toward David, that Jonathan's name is restored.²⁶ A messenger reports to David, "And he said that the people had fled from battle, and also a great many of the people have fallen and died, and also Saul and Jonathan his son died" (II Samuel 1:4b). Whatever the messenger's intention, this news likely hit David with increasing intensity; first the people fled, but even worse many fell, and to add to the misery, his dearest friend died. The elegy

²⁵ I Samuel 31:8-12

²⁶ Although notably, now any mention of his brothers is missing, both in the prose and poetry to follow.

that follows, as well as the mission to reinter Saul and Jonathan's bones properly,²⁷ help to soften the shame and memorialize Jonathan's glory.

The elegy that David composes for Saul and Jonathan has been extensively scrutinized by commentators and academics, with each trying to ascertain how genuine is the grief expressed in these words.²⁸ This raises a problem absent from the stories of Rachel and Er, because readers are told explicitly about Jacob's regrets, Onan's intentions, and Judah's duplicity. In truth, trying to determine the inner thoughts of any biblical figure is a hazardous endeavor that will necessarily lead to incomplete answers, and it is even trickier with David because so many of his speeches and actions can be read as politically motivated. The author of the Book of Samuel is critical of David, in part because he is a king and the book communicates a broader message about the perils of absolute power; I, too, am quite skeptical of David as he gains and then abuses his high status. However, I do believe there are several lines in the text that indicate that David's grief over Jonathan is real, even if it must be expressed alongside strategic responses to the death of Saul. First, when David is informed of Saul and Jonathan's deaths, he asks the messenger, "אֵיךְ יָדַעְתָּ כִּי־ מָת שָׁאוּל וַיהוֹנָתָן בְּנֵו" How do you know that Saul died, and Jonathan his son?" (II Samuel 1:5b). The pause between Saul and Jonathan, indicated by the trope added to the Hebrew text and replicated by a comma in the English translation, suggests both heightened emotion for Jonathan and an internal separation between Jonathan and Saul in David's grieving process. Second, I have translated the first words of David's elegy as "הַצִּבִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל עַל־בְּמוֹתָיִךְ חִלָּל" The roebuck, O Israel, on your heights

²⁷ This effort does not occur until much later in the book, II Samuel 21:12-14. Note that even though I Samuel 31:12-13 states Saul and his sons were all burned and buried, II Samuel 21 only refers to recovering the bones of Saul and Jonathan.

²⁸ A partial list of articles focused on this subject include: Susan Ackerman "When Heroes Love," Orly Keren "David and Jonathan: A Case of Unconditional Love?" Tod Linafelt "Private Poetry and Public Eloquence in 2 Samuel 1:17-27: Hearing and Overhearing David's Lament for Jonathan and Saul," and Yisca Zimran "'Look, the King Is Weeping and Mourning!': Expressions of Mourning in the David Narratives and their Interpretive Contribution."

lies slain” (II Samuel 1:19a). There are several variations for how to translate הַצִּבִּי,²⁹ but the choice of “roebuck” demonstrates that David’s opening word could be a reference to his fallen friend; Jonathan was a swift and capable warrior who climbed up craggy rocks to defeat the Philistines in I Samuel 14, mimicking the surefootedness of a roebuck. Even using other translations, David clearly begins his dirge in the singular, which may show how deeply he is mourning for Jonathan alone, before he must shift to plural language in the second cola to include Saul. Third, at the end of the poem, David instructs others to weep over Saul because he supplied them with concrete goods,³⁰ but he expresses personal distress over Jonathan for far more profound reasons. He refers to him affectionately, saying, “I am distressed over you, my brother, Jonathan. You were most delightful to me, your love was more wonderful to me than the love of women” (II Samuel 1:26). True, David speaks about Jonathan’s love for him explicitly while only implying it was reciprocated, but given David’s self-centered tendencies this may be the most genuine form of love he can express. We will never be able to definitively judge David’s sincerity, but there are subtle markers of his emotions that deserve to be taken seriously as we read his elegy.

Intertextual Similarities, Intergenerational Lessons

The outlines for the deaths of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan show that these three stories are quite different. Each figure dies under a unique set of circumstances and is mourned with distinct rituals. Their cause of death, status, familial role, and gender all impact how their next-of-kin respond to such sudden loss. But alongside these differences, there are several commonalities that link these texts to each other and offer important lessons. By highlighting similarities between these three

²⁹ JPS translates this as “Your glory,” Robert Alter as “The splendor,” Tod Linafelt as “Thy splendor,” A. Guillaume as “Thy beauty,” and James Kennedy as “thy heights.”

³⁰ II Samuel 1:24

texts, we can identify responses to tragedies that transcend specific situations or historical moments and offer us a path through hardship today.

Pursuit of Permanence

a. Rachel

In the wake of a sudden and tragic loss, there often comes a greater awareness of human vulnerability and a strong desire to establish a permanent monument to the deceased. This occurs in the aftermath of Rachel's death. Before Genesis 35, women struggled with conception and pain in pregnancy and delivery, but Rachel is the first figure in the Tanach to die in childbirth, exposing a threat to survival so many women have faced throughout history. This death is upsetting in its own right, reflecting the tremendous risks women take in raising up the next generation, but her burial is even more troubling because it appears to be beneath her station. One would expect Rachel to be interred in the Cave of Machpelah alongside the other matriarchs and patriarchs, but she is buried on the road instead. Cox and Ackerman write that "Hers is a burial...that is portrayed as being performed in a somewhat cursory fashion: in a roadside grave and with no ceremony apart from the erecting of the *masseba* that is common for West Semitic burials."³¹ While Rachel's gravesite is both unexpected and isolated, a topic to which we will return, I would not dismiss the *masseba* that Jacob erects so quickly. Just because a burial custom is common does not make it insignificant, and it may in fact reinforce its importance. A stone pillar is intended to mark a spot in perpetuity, neither moving nor deteriorating over time. Erecting a stone pillar is significant for Jacob specifically, because stones form a leitmotif in his life and are often used to commemorate his interactions with God. The text even breaks its flow to assure the reader that Rachel's *masseba* in fact achieved its goal of permanence; "וַיֵּצֵב יַעֲקֹב מִצְבֵּה עַל-קְבֻרָתָהּ הוּא מִצְבֵּה קְבֻרַת-רָחֵל עַד-הַיּוֹם" Jacob set up a pillar

³¹ Cox and Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," 139.

on her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day" (Genesis 35:20). Rachel then becomes a fixture in the Jewish imagination generations later thanks to Jeremiah, becoming reanimated and repurposed. Referring to Jeremiah 31:15, scholar Herbert Chanan Brichto "states that the association here of land, descendants, return and exile, in the context of the complex he has established, shows that the dead Rachel lives and that her reward for her work in life is the preservation of her descendants on the ancestral land, 'from whose fate her own cannot be sundered.'" ³² The ways that Jacob, Jeremiah, and the biblical narrator interact with Rachel's death expose a desire to secure a permanent place for her in the history and memory of the Jewish people, thereby honoring her and comforting those left behind.

b. Er

Turning to the story of Er, the practice of levirate marriage is intended to ensure a type of permanence for the dead that he was unable to achieve in life. Without an heir, the name of the deceased would disappear, his property disbursed, his memory missing from the performance of ancestral rites. ³³ Millar Burrows explains *yibbum* saying, "In the Israelite institution the end was the preservation of the departed husband's 'name.' The marriage of the widow to the dead man's brother was the means." ³⁴ So great was this desire for preservation that it overrode the prohibition "וְאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִקַּח אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ אֲחִיו נָדָה הוּא עֲרֹנָת אֲחִיו גִּלְהָ עֲרִירִים יִהְיוּ" If a man takes the wife of his brother, it is an impurity; he has uncovered his brother's nakedness and they shall be childless" (Leviticus 20:21). Dying without offspring was such an undesirable situation that this entire verse became flipped, and suddenly it was imperative to take the brother's widow and such an action would be rewarded with offspring. Scholar Alexander Abasili goes so far as to claim that Tamar's extreme act

³² Mathias, "How a Law about Sex," 45.

³³ Millar Burrows, "The Ancient Oriental Background of Hebrew Levirate Marriage," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 77 (1940): 2.

³⁴ Burrows, "The Ancient," 2.

of dressing as a whore and sleeping with her father-in-law was not primarily rooted in her own need for security, but that, “her greatest desire is a means of conception so as to bear offspring for Er.”³⁵ While it is impossible to know her motivations fully, a man dying without a child was certainly cause for alarm for existential reasons, not only practical ones. Everyone left in the wake of this loss was forced to wrestle with the fact of human impermanence, knowing that without a systematic way to counter fate every family line is at risk of ending in each generation. Perhaps this is why the biblical authors greatly reward the men who engage in levirate marriage and punish those who refuse.

Referencing the books of Ruth and Genesis, Weisberg writes,

“Boaz’s act in no way compromises his stature. Like Judah, he is recognized as the father of the child born through the levirate union. Furthermore, it is the men who refuse to perform levirate marriage who must endure the fate to which they would have condemned others—childlessness or the loss of name in Israel. When Onan is mentioned after Genesis 38, the reader is reminded that he has no descendants. As for the redeemer of Ruth 4, he is nameless, the Hebrew Bible’s reminder of his refusal to preserve the name of the dead. No man incurs a disadvantage from performing levirate marriage; nor does refusal to do so bring any benefit.”³⁶

Attributing the children born of these levirate unions to Boaz and Judah rather than Mahlon and Er undermines the initial impulse, but clearly anxiety around impermanence is dominant in these texts, and they aim at incentivizing men to ensure continuity for each other.

c. Jonathan

As stated in the story outline, Jonathan takes part in planning for his own future, at least with respect to ensuring the safety of his descendants. Jonathan can be read in relation to Er, because although he is fortunate enough to produce a male heir before dying, he is acutely aware of the vulnerability of his line. His fears are well-founded, given that Mephibosheth is only five years old when Jonathan died and he becomes maimed in an accident when the news reaches him and his nurse.³⁷ Ironically, this limitation improves his chance of survival because he cannot pose a physical

³⁵ Abasili, “Genesis 38,” 283.

³⁶ Weisberg, “The Widow of Our Discontent,” 420.

³⁷ II Samuel 4:4

threat to the new king, but it also highlights that Jonathan's line could end at any moment. Orly Keren notes that Jonathan's anxieties about his fate form the basis for his pact with David, a wise move for a man aspiring to permanence.³⁸ Additionally, as noted above, Jonathan's repetition of *-טו עולם* reinforces this concern with longevity. But the concern that Jonathan continue on in some way in future generations is not his alone; David also attempts to ensure that his beloved friend will be remembered. Although they are some of the hardest lines to translate, the verses introducing David's elegy for Saul and Jonathan point toward this goal. According to my translation, the text reads, "Then, David chanted this dirge over Saul and over Jonathan his son, and he said to teach [these] hard things to the sons of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar" (II Samuel 1:17-18). Scholars disagree about how to read these phrases, but the two key concepts that this lament be taught to others and be recorded in a book remain consistent.³⁹ David's elegy may serve as a political tool and an emotional outlet, but it also is intended from the outset to commemorate his friend and achieve for him some degree of permanence by expanding the circle of people who recall his valiant deeds.

d. Contemporary Implications

Although many of the specific steps taken by those mourning Rachel, Er, and Jonathan differ from practices today, their desire to achieve some level of permanence for the deceased is familiar. We no longer erect pillars in the same way Jacob did for Rachel, but we often use stones to mark the burial places of our loved ones. In fact, the term *masseba* is still used in modern Hebrew to refer to an upright tombstone, demonstrating that our burial practices are informed by our ancestors, even

³⁸ Orly Keren, "David and Jonathan: A Case of Unconditional Love?" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 1 (2012): 17.

³⁹ For a partial list of translations, see: Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, A. Guillaume "David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan," Tod Linafelt "Private Poetry and Public Eloquence in 2 Samuel 1:17-27: Hearing and Overhearing David's Lament for Jonathan and Saul," and the JPS *Hebrew-English Tanakh*.

if they are not identical.⁴⁰ Gravestones and footstones are staples of Jewish cemeteries, and the practice of placing rocks on these markers rather than flowers that wither and die also symbolizes permanence. At the site of car or bike accidents, it is not uncommon to see a marker along the roadside with a picture of the deceased, and for family and friends to put in effort maintaining these small monuments for decades. The practice of adding the names of loved ones to plaques on the walls of a synagogue and ensuring they are recalled on their *yartzeit* is a blend of the physical aspects of memory in Rachel's story and the importance of names in Er's story. Turning more fully to Er, while levirate marriage is rarely implemented in our world today and is no longer a part of Jewish practice, passing on the name of the deceased is certainly common. While giving the exact name of a person who died suddenly or at a young age may be too painful for their relatives, incorporating a letter, Hebrew name, or fundamental trait can all be ways to honor that person and ensure they are remembered by future generations. Finally, like Jonathan, there are people who die quite young but have taken intentional steps to provide for their children, such as a new parent writing a will or enrolling in a life insurance plan. These things may sound technical, but like Jonathan making a pact with David, they are a way to show concern and ensure safety for one's children. There are also folks who, like David, attempt to commemorate their loved one in such a way that it can be passed on to future generations. This may mean writing down a eulogy, but it can also take the form of a photo album, journal, set of home videos, Facebook page, or anything else that might make the memory of the deceased accessible and enduring.

Impulse to Incriminate

a. Rachel

⁴⁰ "Matzeva | Judaism | Britannica." n.d. www.britannica.com. Accessed January 16, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/matzeva>.

When a person dies unexpectedly, it is natural for those left behind to wonder why. Rather than accept that fate is often illogical and human life is fragile, it can be easier to find someone to blame for this kind of tragedy. Unfortunately, in the case of Rachel's death, she herself appears to be blamed despite being the victim of terrible circumstances. Rashi, the most prolific and respected of scholars, commented on the scene in which Laban demands his household idols be returned and Jacob responds, "עַם אֲשֶׁר תִּמְצָא אֶת־אֱלֹהֶיךָ לֹא יְחַיֶּה נֶגְדֵי אֶחָיו הִכָּר־לְךָ מֶה עָמְדִי וְקָח־לָךְ וְלֹא־יָדַע יַעֲקֹב כִּי" רַחֵל גְּנָבָתָם Anyone with whom you find your gods shall not remain alive! Before our kin, show what is yours that is with me and take it! For Jacob did not know Rachel had stolen them" (Genesis 31:32). He wrote, "In consequence of this curse Rachel died on the journey" (Rashi on Genesis 31:32:1). It is possible to read Rashi's comment as blaming Jacob, but I think the words "For Jacob did not know Rachel had stolen them" indicate that this man should be read as blameless while his wife suffers the consequences of her duplicitous actions. While not as popular as Rashi, another important commentator, Sforno, rejects the idea that the incident with the idols explains Rachel's death. Paying close attention to Jacob's words, he reasons, "actually he had not cursed the thief but the one with whom the stolen goods would be found, and in the event Lavan never did find the *teraphim*" (Sforno on Genesis 31:32:3). Even though I agree with this more careful reading, the impulse to incriminate Rachel may precede the medieval commentators and be present in her burial scene.

We have already noted that Rachel should have been buried in the Cave of Machpelah, and that the place where she died was not unreasonably far from that site, so the location of her grave requires an explanation. According to a cross-cultural study by Cox and Ackerman, the bodies of women who die in childbirth are frequently isolated from the community's other dead. Regarding the concept of blame,

"women who died in childbirth were thought to belong to a special category of deceased known to scholars of religion as the *schlimme Tod*: the 'bad' or 'evil dead.' In the classical

source for this term, *Der Schlimme Tod bei den Völkern Indonesiens*, Hans Joachim Sell identifies these ‘bad dead’ as people who have met *untimely* (sudden or unexpected) and/or *unnatural* (violent or tragic) ends.”⁴¹ While applying customs from different cultures to the Torah can lead to inaccuracies, it is rare for women in the Tanach to die in childbirth, and even less common to be given details about their burial. Therefore, we must look to outside sources to piece together a theory of why this beloved and cherished wife was treated so unceremoniously. The idea that a mother who died in childbirth was thought to bring some invisible contagion or bad luck to others is a plausible explanation for Rachel’s improper burial.

b. Er

The impulse to incriminate is far more explicit in the story of Er’s death, although once again it is a woman who is subjected to mistreatment. Ironically, the reader is told explicitly that Er and Onan were considered evil in the eyes of God, and therefore they were killed by Divine action. Judah, however, is unaware of his sons’ faults and sees that marriage to Tamar is the common denominator in their untimely deaths. “Since he perceives Tamar as his sons’ agent of death, Judah refrains from obeying the customary (Levirate) obligation of giving Shelah to her in marriage.”⁴² In Judah’s eyes, Tamar is an outsider who threatens his line; she must be treated with suspicion and driven away from the family. Therefore, not only does he withhold Shelah, but he also sends Tamar to her father’s house and later jumps at the chance to dispose of her entirely. When he is told of Tamar’s pregnancy, he immediately orders the unprecedented punishment, “Bring her out to be burned!” In that moment, Judah finally has communal sanction for the action he wanted to take ever since Onan died and Judah became suspicious of his daughter-in-law. Sadly, in seeing Tamar as a black widow rather than simply a widow, Judah imagined he could escape his obligation to ensure

⁴¹ Cox and Ackerman, “Rachel’s Tomb,” 142.

⁴² Abasili, “Genesis 38,” 281.

her security and wellbeing. Blame blinded Judah to Tamar's vulnerability and allowed his self-interest to override his duties both as father of Er and head of the household.

c. Jonathan

Identifying precisely who is at fault for Jonathan's death is a tricky endeavor, but the narrator shows David, Samuel, and God all engage in a blame game at some point in the story. David blames the Amalekite messenger who claimed to kill Saul, commanding his lad to strike him down. He then speaks to this corpse saying, "Your blood is upon your head, for your mouth testified against you, saying, 'I myself killed the anointed of YHVH'" (II Samuel 1:16). This is a performative declaration, made for the benefit of the living, to allay any suspicions that David was involved in or rejoicing over Saul's downfall. Robert Polzin goes as far as to claim the Amalekite is a reflection of David himself, pretending to mourn the old king while not-so-subtly celebrating his death and the rewards it might bring, making the killing of this Davidic double that much more strategically important.⁴³ Whatever the political benefit, from David's perspective, the blame for Saul and Jonathan's deaths lie with known enemies who have waged war against Israel for generations.

For their own part, Samuel and God are much more inclined to blame one of the victims and cast Saul's missteps as the reason behind his death and that of his sons. Saul makes unauthorized sacrifices in I Samuel 13, does not proscribe all the people and livestock of Amalek in I Samuel 15, and hypocritically raises the spirit of the prophet in I Samuel 28, all actions that cast him as a foolish and undeserving king. These mistakes set Saul up for a total downfall, the presence of an Amalekite messenger makes his death scene appear as a "'measure for measure' analogy to Saul's sin at the time of the Amalekite war."⁴⁴ Jonathan himself may be blameless, but the narrator shows how

⁴³ Robert Polzin, *David and the Deuteronomist: A Literary Study of the Deuteronomistic History Part Three: 2 Samuel*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 6-8.

⁴⁴ Uriel Simon, *Reading Prophetic Narratives*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 90.

important it is for David, Samuel, and God to explain his untimely downfall by showing there is someone at fault.

d. Contemporary Implications

Today, the issue of assigning blame when a loved one dies suddenly or too soon is complex and sensitive. It would be shocking to see anyone behave like Samuel and scold a person on the eve of his death, or to hear of a woman who passed away in childbirth buried separately from her family like Rachel. Still, anger is an acknowledged stage in the grieving process, and that anger may take the form of blame depending on the circumstances that lead to a person's death. If someone is killed in an accident, whether on a highway or street or at work, there is a legal framework for assessing fault and punishing those found guilty. If someone dies due to a medical complication that can be tied to unhealthy habits, such as smoking or drinking or improper nutrition, those left behind may resent the deceased for not taking better care of themselves. Indeed, the deceased may have struggled with self-criticism and shame when they were alive, rather than having grace for themselves and seeking to understand the many factors that influenced their habits. Certainly, some instances of assigning blame are logical and necessary, like punishing reckless driving, but blame can also be used to avoid impossibly hard questions that arise when a loved one dies suddenly. Blame is often used to make the world seem ordered and just, to reassure someone that if they simply do the right things they will be spared from tragedy. In reality, bad things do happen to good people, plenty of folks suffer for reasons completely outside their control, and all human life is intrinsically fragile and precious. One should never push a mourner to confront these existential problems before they are ready, but neither biblical nor modern incriminations should be the end point in the grieving process.

The Living Take the Lead

a. Rachel

Particularly in cases of sudden and tragic deaths, one might expect that those left behind would do everything in their power to honor the wishes and preserve the memories of the deceased. However, we see in all three cases studied in this thesis chapter that competing interests impact the decisions of the living, and they often end up prioritizing their own needs. This tension plays out in two ways in the story of Rachel's death and legacy. The first way concerns Rachel's burial site, which has been discussed in previous sections of this paper. Properly honoring Rachel would have entailed transporting her body some miles away to the Cave of Machpelah and interring her alongside the other matriarchs and patriarchs. Unfortunately, either because of the inconvenience of the travel or because of superstitions around women who died in childbirth,⁴⁵ Jacob buries Rachel alongside the road.

The second, and more complicated, way the tension between the needs of the dead and the living arises concerns the name of the infant Rachel births. The text relays in painful detail, "And it happened, when her life was giving out, for she was dying, that she called his name Ben-Oni, but his father called him Benjamin" (Genesis 35:18). Rachel's final act, the one she carried out with her last bit of energy, was to name her son Ben-Oni, which could be translated as "son of my vigor" or "son of my sorrow." This name could either be seen as a mother blessing her child with her last ounce of vitality or cursing that same child for causing her pain. When Jacob renames the infant Benjamin, "son of the right hand" or "son of the south," he privileges the wellbeing and reputation of this child over the wishes of his dying wife. It is quite difficult to see Rachel's final words ignored, but it is also a relief to know her child was spared from the trauma of a guilt-inducing name. This can be read as part of a larger pattern of Jacob ignoring the needs of his wives, or the patriarchy that runs

⁴⁵ Cox and Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," 142.

throughout the Torah, but it can also be seen as a way to honor Rachel's essence as a loving mother rather than memorialize her at her most difficult moment.

b. Er

When Er dies, he leaves behind three people whose needs often conflict with their obligation to uphold his memory and with one another. Initially, Judah turns to Onan to sire a child on behalf of his deceased brother. However, "Onan knew that if his brother had no progeny, 'his double portion' as the first son will revert to him and his children...[so he] allows his selfish concerns to override his fraternal loyalty and family duty."⁴⁶ This selfishness is unacceptable, and Onan is duly punished, but his actions are not surprising in the context of Genesis. As Dvora Weisberg points out, "Nothing about the relationship of brothers in the Hebrew Bible would suggest that a man could expect altruism or affection from his brother."⁴⁷ Bereft of two sons, Judah's calculations shift, and Er is no longer at the top of his list. He must preserve Shelah or else his line could end, so Tamar, whom he believes to be an agent of death, is sent away.⁴⁸ Unlike these two male relatives whose interests compete with those of Er, Tamar's needs align with the goal of preserving his name. In the ancient world, if a woman's husband died, she "must rely on her children for support; for they inherit the father's property. In terms of long-range security in the social structure, it is more important for a woman to become her children's mother than her husband's wife."⁴⁹ Childlessness threatens to erase Er and impoverish Tamar, and so she acts in both of their interests when she dresses as a harlot and conceives by Judah. It is not possible to determine how much her actions were motivated by self-interest versus a duty to preserve her husband's line, but Tamar certainly must factor in her own predicament and needs as she navigates this situation. Between Onan, Judah, and Tamar, the

⁴⁶ Abasili, "Genesis 38," 281.

⁴⁷ Weisberg, "The Widow of Our Discontent," 412.

⁴⁸ Abasili, "Genesis 38," 287.

⁴⁹ Niditch, "The Wronged Woman Righted," 145.

reader sees a spectrum of more and less palatable ways that the needs of the living interact with their obligations to the dead.

c. Jonathan

In many ways, David properly honors Jonathan and preserves his name for generations to come. As has been discussed, David fulfills his pact with Jonathan by caring for Mephibosheth, even though allowing a member of Saul's line to remain alive could present a challenge to his rule. He also dictates that his elegy be written down and taught to others, so Jonathan's military prowess and abiding love would not be forgotten. Still, David's poem is also shaped by political considerations, and his need to win public opinion distorts the commemoration of his beloved friend. As discussed above, David must be seen as blameless and distraught regarding Saul's death because he so obviously benefits from his predecessor's downfall; ordering the Amalekite messenger killed and proclaiming guilt to his dead body are just the first public acts designed to achieve that end.⁵⁰ David also misrepresents the relationship between Saul and Jonathan in the elegy, saying, "שָׁוֶל וַיְהוֹנָתָן, הַנְּאֻהָבִים וְהַנְּעִימִם בְּחַיֵּיהֶם וּבְמוֹתָם לֹא נִפְרְדּוּ Saul and Jonathan, beloved and delightful/In their lives and in their deaths never were they parted..."⁵¹ In fact, the two were divided in life because of Jonathan's loyalty to and love for David, but raising that fissure would jeopardize David's goal and arouse suspicion. As a result, Jonathan does not get the full credit he deserves for fighting alongside Saul despite the ways he was mistreated, showing loyalty to his father that exceeded all personal interest. Unlike Rachel and Er, Jonathan receives a fitting memorial and his legacy is protected, but even still, the concerns of the living leave a noticeable mark.

d. Contemporary Implications

⁵⁰ II Samuel 1:15-16

⁵¹ II Samuel 1:23a

It can be difficult to see how biblical figures we often admire allow their needs to impact the ways they mourn and memorialize their loved ones. Far better to read of a child or a spouse executing a list of last wishes faithfully, not allowing their own concerns to enter the picture. Yet, reading about the flawed responses of these characters may also be helpful and comforting because none of us living today are perfect. We may want to honor a grandparent's wish to keep a cherished object in the family, but financial pressures force us to sell it, or we plan to visit a friend's grave regularly but then relocate for a new job opportunity, or maybe we committed to naming a child after a lost sibling but doing so just feels too upsetting. There are times when people shirk their duty to the deceased for purely selfish reasons, like Onan, and we would be treating these responsibilities too lightly if we refrained from passing any judgment. But more often, we are trying to balance the wishes of the dead with the needs of other living people we care about, like Jacob renaming Benjamin. Or perhaps we feel restricted in what we can express publicly but have a deep well of emotions under the surface, like David. Hopefully, by seeing the ways in which even venerated figures fall short of the ideal, we can accept the times that our own responses to death feel imperfect.

Long-term Learning and Character Change

a. Rachel

Even though many of the biblical figures left to mourn their loved ones did so in imperfect ways, they also demonstrate a capacity to learn and grow, allowing these experiences to change them for the better. This is true of Jacob as he reflects on the improper burial that he gave Rachel. He recounts, "וַאֲנִי בָבְאִי מִפָּדָן עָלַי רָחֵל בְּאֶרֶץ כְּנָעַן בְּדֶרֶךְ בְּעוֹד כְּבָרְתִּי אֶרֶץ לְבָא אֶפְרָתָה וְאֶקְבְּרָה שָׁם" (For I, in my coming from Paddan, Rachel died on me, in the land of Canaan on the way, where there was still more distance to go toward Ephrath, and I buried her on the way" (Genesis 48:7). This

intense focus on location and place names reveals Jacob's discomfort about Rachel's burial site. More poignantly, though, Robert Alter points out the weight of the word 'על, which I have translated as "on me" but can also be read in context as "to my grief." He claims "[Jacob's] vivid sense of anguish, after all these decades, is registered in the single word 'alai...the same word he uses in 42:36, when he says that all the burden of bereavement [for Joseph's supposed death] is on him..."⁵² The two greatest tragedies in Jacob's life were the losses of Joseph and Rachel, and he bewailed the former extensively but was oddly cold about the latter. As Jacob lays on his own deathbed, he finally rediscovers the emotions he felt when he believed Joseph had died and directs them toward Rachel. But this time, rather than simply getting caught up in his own grief as he did with Joseph, Jacob concentrates on doing right by his beloved wife. He gives her eldest child a double portion, granting the privilege of primogeniture to Rachel's firstborn, a type of *tikkun* for the way she was usurped in marriage order and delayed in childbearing. Adopting Manasseh and Ephraim also grants Rachel additional children, a fitting tribute to a woman who cared so deeply about her role as a mother.

There is one other aspect of Jacob's character development that is revealed as he lays on his own deathbed and obsesses over Rachel's burial. In addition to the regret Jacob feels over the way he treated Rachel, he seems to also be grappling with anxiety about his own burial. Rachel died nearer to the Cave of Machpelah but was not interred there, while Jacob "is about to die at least two hundred miles away in Egypt"⁵³ and requests that his body be transported this great distance. In addition to the logistical concerns, Jacob has other reason to worry that his last wishes will not be respected. After all, his explanation of the importance of being buried with family "might naturally trigger resentment in Joseph: If being buried in the family plot is really so important, why did Jacob

⁵² Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1995), 288.

⁵³ Cox and Ackerman, "Rachel's Tomb," 137.

not extend this honor to his mother?"⁵⁴ Jacob, who learned to walk through the world confident that God would see to his needs, who never before feared the consequences of upsetting his children, suddenly realizes his limitations. He is dependent on the goodwill of others to carry out his requests after he dies, and his own treatment of Rachel proves that not everyone gets a proper burial. Alongside the anxiety that this provokes, Jacob also seems to arrive at a place of humility, facing death not only as a revered patriarch but also as a limited human being.

b. Er

In the complicated aftermath of Er's death, both Tamar and Judah learn important life lessons and become better versions of themselves. Unlike the daughter of Shua, Tamar enters the story as a named woman, indicating her importance and perhaps her independence from the start. However, she then becomes subservient and voiceless, passed over to Onan, mistreated by him, and then inappropriately sent to her father's home to languish in widowhood. When Tamar sees she has been lied to, she acts boldly and cleverly, reclaiming her agency. In a world dominated by ethically questionable people, she imposes moral order and exacts justice for the vulnerable, both for Er as the deceased and for herself as a widow. Tamar comes to understand that there is a higher authority than the various men in her life, and that she can be a partner in imposing God's justice rather than a victim of these thoughtless men.

The transformation that Judah undergoes in the wake of Er's death and Tamar's actions is nothing short of extraordinary. Preceding this episode, Judah convinced his brothers not to kill Joseph, but instead to make a profit selling him into slavery; he then appeared to have no qualms convincing Jacob his favorite child had died. In that episode, there is a tiny seed of hope that Judah might be redeemable, given that he spared Joseph's life, but still his actions are reprehensible. A similar pattern unfolds in Genesis 38; he initially shows some goodness when he prioritizes the

⁵⁴ Joel B. Wolowelsky, "Rachel's Burial," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (2017): 112.

needs of Tamar and Er, but as soon as Onan dies, he turns to deception and injustice to secure his own interests. When Tamar reveals that she has conceived through Judah, his admission, 'צִדְקָה מֵעַנִי' (She is more righteous than I" (Genesis 38:26) sets him on a path toward his own righteousness and redemption. Finally on the other end of deception and loss, Judah grows in empathy and proves himself capable of *teshuva*. When he is once again faced with Jacob's favoritism, he steps in to ensure the safety of Benjamin, becoming a leader worthy of his position and marking himself as a distinguished successor.

c. Jonathan

David is a flawed figure who makes several unethical choices as he attains and wields power, but his relationship with Jonathan highlights the best of his character. When David and Jonathan made their pact to ensure each other's protection, David agreed to guard Jonathan's descendants. Once Jonathan gave David the information he needed to survive, though, David had nothing to gain from upholding the agreement, and in fact had much to lose keeping safe potential claimants to the throne. We could say that fear of Divine punishment led David to fulfill his commitment, but this is a man who broke the bonds of Bathsheba's marriage and ignored his duties as military commander in ordering Uriah killed. Moreover, David approves the killing of Saul's other grandchildren, demonstrating his concern and political savvy. It seems to me that feelings of affection and loyalty toward Jonathan factor into David's behavior, bringing out the best in him that we see in the Book of Samuel.⁵⁵ The efforts David takes to honor the fallen Jonathan, securing the legacy of his dearest friend even against his own interests, also show the most honorable parts of David's character.

d. Contemporary Implications

⁵⁵ Chronicles will paint a far rosier picture of King David, but the Book of Samuel includes many low points in his life and seems quite critical in its assessment of his character.

People who experience loss today may grow and change in ways similar to our ancestors, even if the specific circumstances of their losses are quite different. Like Jacob, we may regret the way we acted in the immediate aftermath of a death, either concealing the depths of our feelings or struggling to provide a fitting burial or funeral service. There are many emotional, logistical, and financial obstacles that can get in the way, and they can cause feelings of guilt. Still, as Jacob shows, there are ways to rectify the situation, to face such shortcomings even years later and find a path to properly honor the memory of the deceased and arrive at a sense of peace. Like Tamar, we might have to become strong self-advocates after the death of a loved one, seeing to our own wellbeing even when others do not. As in her case, those left behind may need to ensure their own financial security in the wake of a death, or they may need to redefine their relationships with extended family who have become wrapped up in their own needs to a harmful extent. Or, like David, we may hold a soft spot in our hearts for the deceased that shows the best of who we are and what we can give to the people we love. The hope is to let that feeling radiate out and, rather than concentrating it only on the person who passed away, bring that loving version of ourselves to our other relationships as well.

Conclusion

Rachel, Er, and Jonathan all die at the peak of their abilities, during the stage of life when people build up their houses and come into their own. This means that in addition to mourning the loss of these three as individuals, their loved ones are also left to grieve the loss of their unfulfilled potential. While some people today pass away in situations similar to those of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan, in childbirth, before bearing children, or in battle, modern medicine and technology has made these specific circumstances less common. This leads many people today to feel insulated from the threat of an early death, but untimely losses still happen, and it is difficult to know where to turn for support when tragedy occurs. There is no substitute for loving family, friends, and

community, grief groups, or trained therapists, but Jewish texts can supplement this care. The stories of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan show that such tragedies are not beyond the scope of our tradition. In addition, the reader views in the responses of their loved ones a combination of the real and the ideal. The impulse to incriminate and the prioritization of the needs of the living represent the real ways in which grieving people process anger and fall short of perfection. By honestly sharing the faults of our ancestors, the Tanach provides reassurance that we are not alone in our shortcomings. Still, these stories hold out the hope that ideally, we will be able to establish lasting memorials to those we have lost, and even grow from these tragedies in a way that brings out the best in ourselves. As difficult as they may be, the stories of Rachel, Er, and Jonathan are deeply human and offer so much if we allow them to speak to us today.

Translation: Rachel's Death
Genesis 31:19, 26-35; 35:1-29; Jeremiah 31:15-17

Genesis 31:19

וּלְבָן	הֵלַךְ	לִגְזֹז	אֶת־צֹאֲנוֹ	וַתִּגְנוֹב
And Laban	he went	to shear	(to) his sheep	and she stole
רָחֵל	אֶת־הַתְּרָפִים	אֲשֶׁר	לְאִבֶּיהָ	
Rachel	(to) the idols	which	to her father	

And Laban went to shear his sheep, and Rachel stole her father's idols.

Genesis 31:26

וַיֹּאמֶר	לְבָן	לִיעֲקֹב	מָה	עָשִׂיתָ	וַתִּגְנוֹב
He said	Laban	to Jacob	what	you did	you stole
אֶת־לִבִּי	וַתִּנְהַג	אֶת־בְּנוֹתַי	כַּשְׁבִּיּוֹת	חֶרֶב	
(to) my inner self	you drove	(to) my daughters	as captive women	sword	

And Laban said to Jacob, "What did you do, deceiving me and driving my daughters off like captives of the sword?

Genesis 31:27

לָמָּה	נִחַבְתָּ	לְבַלֹּחַ	וַתִּגְנוֹב	אֵתִי	וְלֹא־הִגַּדְתָּ
Why	you hid yourself	to flee	you stole	to me	and no you told me
לִי	וָאֲשַׁלְחֶךָ	בְּשִׂמְחָה	וּבִשְׁרִים	בְּתֵרֶף	וּבִכְנֹר
to me	I sent you	in joy	and in songs	in timbrel	and in lyre

"Why did you flee in stealth and deceive me and not tell me? I would have sent you off with joy and songs, with timbrel and lyre!

Genesis 31:28

וְלֹא	נָתַתְנִי	לְנִשֵּׁק	לְבָנַי		
And no	you permitted me	to kiss	my sons		
וּלְבְנוֹתַי	עַתָּה	הִסְכַּלְתָּ	עָשׂוּ		
and my daughters	now	you were fooling	you did		

"But you did not permit me to kiss my sons and my daughters. Now that was a foolish thing you did!

Genesis 31:29

יֵשׁ־לֹאֵל	יָדִי	לַעֲשׂוֹת	עִמָּכֶם	רָע	וְאֱלֹהֵי
There is to power	my hand	to do	with you all	evil	but God of
אֲבִיכֶם	אָמַשׁ	אָמַר	אֵלַי	לֵאמֹר	הַשָּׂמֶר
your fathers	last night	he said	to me	saying	guard
לָךְ	מִדְּבַר	עִם־יַעֲקֹב	מִטּוֹב	עַד־רָע	
to you	from speaking	with Jacob	from good	until evil	

“There is power in my hand to do you evil, but the God of your fathers spoke to me last night saying, ‘Guard yourself against speaking with Jacob, whether good or evil.’

Genesis 31:30

וְעַתָּה	הֲלַךְ	הֲלַכְתָּ	כִּי־נִכְסַף	נִכְסַפְתָּה
And now	go	you went	for you longed for	longed for
לְבֵית	אָבִיר	לָמָּה	גָּנַבְתָּ	אֶת־אֱלֹהֵי
to house	your father	why	you stole	(to) my gods

“And now, you surely went because you deeply longed for your father’s house,⁵⁶ but why did you steal my gods?”

Genesis 31:31

וַיַּעַן	יַעֲקֹב	וַיֹּאמֶר	לְלָבָן	כִּי	יָרֵאתִי
He answered	Jacob	he said	to Laban	for	I was afraid
כִּי	אָמַרְתִּי	פֶּן־תִּגְזַל	אֶת־בָּנוֹתַי	מֵעִמִּי	
for	I said	lest you seize	(to) your daughters	from with me	

Jacob answered and said to Laban, “For I was afraid, for I said [to myself] lest you take your daughters away from me.

Genesis 31:32

עִם	אֲשֶׁר	תִּמְצָא	אֶת־אֱלֹהֶיךָ	לֹא	יֵחִיָּה
With	which	you will find	(to) your gods	no	he will live
נֶגְדִי	אֶחָיו	הִכְרִיזְךָ	מָה	עִמָּדִי	וְקַח־לְךָ
against	our brothers	recognize to you	what	with me	and take to you
וְלֹא־יָדַעַ	יַעֲקֹב	כִּי	רָחֵל	גָּנְבָתָם	
and no he knows	Jacob	for	Rachel	she stole them	

“With whomever you find your gods, that person shall not live!⁵⁷ Before our kinsmen, make known what of yours is with me, and take it.” But Jacob did not know that Rachel had stolen them.

Genesis 31:33

וַיָּבֹא	לָבָן	בְּאֶהֱלִי	יַעֲקֹב	וּבְאֶהֱלִי	לֵאָה
He entered	Laban	in tent	Jacob	and in tent	Leah
וּבְאֶהֱלִי	שְׁתֵּי	הָאֻמָּהֹת	וְלֹא	מָצָא	וַיֵּצֵא
and in tent	two of	the handmaids	and no	he found	he went out

⁵⁶ Laban seems unable to acknowledge the harm or offense he has done to Jacob. He can only say that Jacob longs for his father’s house, that he is running *to* a place rather than running *away* from his mistreatment.

⁵⁷ The force of this statement is a subject of debate. Some claim that Jacob is declaring a type of oath that seals Rachel’s fate and is the cause of her death in childbirth. Others point out that Jacob begins his statement “With whomever you find your gods,” not “Whoever has your gods.” Laban never actually finds his gods with Rachel, so I am inclined to agree with those who say this verse is disconnected from Rachel’s death. Still, I include this incident in my translations because many readers connect this scene with her passing.

מֵאֶהָל	לֵאָה	וַיָּבֹא	בְּאֶהָל	רָחֵל
from tent	Leah	he entered	in tent	Rachel

So, Laban came into Jacob's tent and into Leah's tent and into the tent of the two handmaids, but he did not find [them]; and he went out from Leah's tent and came into Rachel's tent.

Genesis 31:34

וְרָחֵל	לָקְחָהּ	אֶת־הַתְּרִפִּים	וַתִּשְׁמֶם	בְּכֹר	הַגִּמְלָה	וַתֵּשֶׁב
And Rachel	she took	(to) the idols	she put them	in cushion	the camel	she sat
עֲלֵיהֶם	וַיִּמְשֹׁשׁ	לָבָן	אֶת־כָּל־הָאֶהָל	וְלֹא	מָצָא	
upon them	he groped	Laban	(to) all the tent	and no	he found	

But Rachel took the idols and put them in the camel cushion and sat upon them; Laban rummaged through the whole tent but he did not find [them].

Genesis 31:35

וַתֹּאמֶר	אֶל־אָבִיהָ	אֶל־יִחְרָל	בְּעֵינֵי	אֲדֹנָי	כִּי
She said	to her father	do not burn	in the eyes of	my lord	for
לֹא	אוּכַלִּי	לָקוּם	מִפְּנֵיךְ	כִּי־דֶרֶךְ	נָשִׁים
no	I can	to rise	from before you	for way	women
לִי	וַיִּחְפֹּשׁ	וְלֹא	מָצָא	אֶת־הַתְּרִפִּים	
to me	he searched	and no	he found	(to) the idols	

She said to her father, "Let anger not be kindled in the eyes of my lord, for I cannot rise before you, for I am in the way of women."⁵⁸ So, he searched but he did not find the idols.

Genesis 35:1

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל־יַעֲקֹב	קוּם	עֲלֵה	בֵּית־אֵל
He said	God	to Jacob	rise up	ascend	Bethel
וַיֵּשְׁב־שָׁם	וַעֲשֵׂה־שָׁם	מִזְבֵּחַ	לֵאלֹהִי	הַנִּרְאָה	
and dwell there	and make there	altar	to God	who appeared	
אֵלַיךְ	בְּבָרְחֶךָ	מִפְּנֵי	עֲשׂוּ	אֶחָיְךָ	
to you	in your fleeing	from before	Esau	your brother	

God said to Jacob, "Arise, go up to Bethel and dwell there and make there an altar to God Who appeared to you when you fled from Esau your brother."

Genesis 35:2

⁵⁸ There is a tragic irony here that Rachel relies upon menstruation to get away with stealing her father's idols, a plan that works seamlessly because Rachel struggled to conceive and therefore bled regularly. This same excuse may not have worked for Leah, whose monthly cycle would have been disrupted many times by pregnancy and breastfeeding. The next time Rachel's cycle is interrupted is when she conceives Benjamin, whose birth will bring about her death. While I believe it is too far of a stretch to say Rachel's death was a punishment for stealing the idols, this does show that the two scenes are linked in an important way.

וַיֹּאמֶר	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל-בֵּיתוֹ	וְאֵל	כָּל-אֲשֶׁר	עִמּוֹ	הָסֵרוּ
He said	Jacob	to his house	and to	all which	with him	depart

אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי	הַנֹּכַר	אֲשֶׁר	בְּתוֹכְכֶם	וְהִטְהָרוּ	וְהִחֲלִיפוּ	שְׂמַלְתֵּיכֶם
(to) gods	the foreign	which	in your midst	purify yourselves	change	your garments

So, Jacob said to his household and to all who were with him, “Remove the alien gods which are in your midst and purify yourselves and change your garments.

Genesis 35:3

וְנִקְוָמָה	וְנֵעְלָה	בֵּית-אֵל	וְאֶעֱשֶׂה-שָׁם	מִזְבֵּחַ
Let us rise	let us go up	Bethel	I shall make there	altar

לֹאל	הֵעֲנָה	אֵתִי	בְּיוֹם	צָרָתִי
to God	who answered	to me	in the day	my distress

וַיְהִי	עִמָּדִי	בַּדֶּרֶךְ	אֲשֶׁר	הֵלַכְתִּי
he was	with me	in the path	which	I walked

“And let us rise and go up to Bethel, and I shall make there an altar to God Who answered me on the day of my distress and was with me on the path that I walked.”

Genesis 35:4

וַיִּתְּנוּ	אֶל-יַעֲקֹב	אֵת	כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי	הַנֹּכַר	אֲשֶׁר
They gave	to Jacob	(to)	all gods	the foreign	which

בְּיָדָם	וְאֶת-הַחֲזָמִים	אֲשֶׁר	בְּאָזְנֵיהֶם	וַיִּטְמֶן	אֹתָם
in their hand	and (to) the rings	which	in their ears	he concealed	to them

יַעֲקֹב	תַּחַת	הָאֵלֶּה	אֲשֶׁר	עִם-שֶׁכֶם
Jacob	under	the terebinth	which	with Shechem

So, they gave to Jacob all the alien gods⁵⁹ that were in their hands, and the rings that were in their ears, and Jacob buried them under the terebinth that is near Shechem.

Genesis 35:5

וַיִּסְעוּ	וַיְהִי	חִתָּת	אֱלֹהִים	עַל-הָעָרִים	אֲשֶׁר
They pulled out	he will be	terror of	God	upon the cities	which

סָבִיבוֹתֵיהֶם	וְלֹא	קָדְפוּ	אַחֲרָי	בְּנֵי	יַעֲקֹב
round about them	and no	they pursued	after	sons of	Jacob

They journeyed on and the terror of God was upon the cities round about them, so none pursued the sons of Jacob.

⁵⁹ This chapter opens with a scene of both faith and domination. Jacob hears the voice of God, is reminded of the Divine protection he enjoyed the last time he journeyed, and acts to reinforce that connection. In doing so, he exercises authority over the subordinates in his household and imposes religious uniformity. It does not say explicitly whether Rachel turned over the stolen idols at this point, and I am inclined to think that such an event would warrant explicit recognition. However, bringing up alien gods shortly before her death may imply guilt, and helps explain why generations of commentators saw Rachel's death through the lens of punishment.

Genesis 35:6

וַיָּבֹא	יַעֲקֹב	לְלוּזָה	אֲשֶׁר	בְּאֶרֶץ	כְּנָעַן
He went in	Jacob	toward Luz	which	in land	Canaan
הָיָה	בֵּית־אֵל	הָיָה	וְכָל־הָעָם	אֲשֶׁר־עִמּוֹ	
he	Bethel	he	and all the nation	which with him	

Then, Jacob came to Luz in the land of Canaan, that is Bethel, he and all the people who were with him.

Genesis 35:7

וַיִּבֶן	שָׁם	מִזְבֵּחַ	וַיִּקְרָא	לְמָקוֹם	
He built	there	altar	he called	to the place	
אֵל	בֵּית־אֵל	כִּי	שָׁם	נִגְלוּ	
to	Bethel	for	there	he was revealed	
אֵלָיו	הָאֱלֹהִים	בְּבִרְחוֹ	מִפְנֵי	אָחִיו	
to him	the God	in his escape	from before	his brother	

And he built there an altar and he called the place El-Bethel, for there God was revealed to him in his fleeing from his brother.

Genesis 35:8

וַתָּמָת	דְּבוֹרָה	מִיְּנֻקָּתָהּ	רִבְקָה	וַתִּקְבֹּר	מֵתַחַת	לְבֵית־אֵל
She died	Deborah	nurse of	Rebekah	she was buried	from under	to Bethel
תַּחַת	הָאֵלֹן	וַיִּקְרָא	שְׁמוֹ	אֵלֹן	בְּקוּת	
under	the oak	he called	his name	Allon	Bacuth	

Then, Deborah, the nurse of Rebekah, died and was buried below Bethel under the oak, and its name was called Allon-Bacuth (Weeping Oak).⁶⁰

Genesis 35:9

וַיֵּרָא	אֱלֹהִים	אֶל־יַעֲקֹב	עוֹד	בְּבֹאוֹ	
He appeared	God	to Jacob	again	in his coming	
מִפַּדָּן	אֲרָם	וַיְבָרֶךְ	אֹתוֹ		
from Paddan	Aram	he was blessed	to him		

God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-Aram and blessed him.

Genesis 35:10

וַיֹּאמֶר־לּוֹ	אֱלֹהִים	שְׁמֶךָ	יַעֲקֹב	לֹא־יִקְרָא	
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⁶⁰ The interjection of this verse is strange, and a reader wonders how Deborah came to be with Jacob's camp. According to Rashi, she was sent by Rebekah to tell Jacob it was time to return, and she died on the journey back. What is so striking, however, is to read Deborah's death shortly before that of Rachel and to compare how they are marked. Rachel receives a stone pillar to mark her burial place, which is longer-lasting and requires more effort to set up than a tree, but Deborah's burial place is named with emotional language. The text says nothing about weeping for Rachel or the emotional toll of her death on Jacob or anyone else.

no he will call	Jacob	your name	God	He said to him
אִם־יִשְׂרָאֵל	כִּי	יַעֲקֹב	עוֹד	שֵׁמְךָ
if Israel	for	Jacob	again	your name
יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶת־שְׁמוֹ	וַיִּקְרָא	שֵׁמְךָ	יְהִי־הוּא
Israel	to his name	he will call	your name	he will be

God said to him, “Your name Jacob, no longer shall your name be Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” And God called his name Israel.

Genesis 35:11

שַׁדַּי	אֵל	אֲנִי	אֱלֹהִים	לּוֹ	וַיֹּאמֶר
Shaddai	El	I	God	to him	He said
גוֹיִם	וְקָהָל	גּוֹי	וּרְבָה	פְּרָה	
nations	assembly	nation	and increase	bear fruit	
יֵצְאוּ	מִחֲלָצִיךָ	וּמַלְכִּים	מִמֶּךָ	יְהִי־הוּא	
they will go out	from your loins	and kings	from you	he will be	

God said to him, “I am El Shaddai. Be fruitful and multiply. A nation, an assembly of nations, shall be from you, and kings shall come forth from your loins.

Genesis 35:12

לָךְ	וּלְיִצְחָק	לְאַבְרָהָם	נָתַתִּי	אֲשֶׁר	וְאֶת־הָאָרֶץ
to you	and to Isaac	to Abraham	I gave	which	And (to) to the land
אֶת־הָאָרֶץ	אֶתֵּן	אַחֲרֶיךָ	וּלְזֶרְעֶךָ	אֶתְנַנָּה	
(to) the land	I will give	after you	and to your seed	I will give her	

“And the land that I gave to Abraham and to Isaac, to you I shall give it, and to your seed after you I shall give the land.”

Genesis 35:13

אֵתוֹ	אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר	בַּמָּקוֹם	אֱלֹהִים	מֵעָלָיו	וַיַּעַל
to him	which he spoke	in the place	God	from upon him	He went up

Then, God ascended from him in the place where God had spoken to him.

Genesis 35:14

מַצֵּבָה	אֵתוֹ	אֲשֶׁר־דִּבֶּר	בַּמָּקוֹם	מַצֵּבָה	יַעֲקֹב	וַיַּעֲבֵד
pillar of	to him	which he spoke	in the place	pillar	Jacob	He stood up
שֶׁמֶן	עָלֶיהָ	וַיִּצֶק	נֹסֶךְ	עָלֶיהָ	וַיִּסַּךְ	אֶבֶן
oil	upon her	he poured	drink offering	upon her	he poured	stone

Jacob set up a pillar in the place where God had spoken to him, a pillar of stone, and he poured a drink offering upon it and poured oil upon it.

Genesis 35:15

וַיִּקְרָא	יַעֲקֹב	אֶת־שֵׁם	הַמָּקוֹם	אֲשֶׁר
He called	Jacob	to name	the place	which
דִּבֶּר	אֵתוֹ	שָׁם	אֱלֹהִים	בֵּית־אֵל
he spoke	to him	there	God	Bethel

Jacob called the name of the place where God had spoken to him Bethel.

Genesis 35:16

וַיִּסְעוּ	מִבֵּית	אֵל	וַיְהִי־עוֹד	כְּבֵר־הָאָרֶץ	לָבוֹא
They pulled out	from house	God	it was again	distance of the land	to come
אֶפְרָתָה	וַתֵּלֶד	רָחֵל	וַתִּקֶּשׁ	בְּלִדְתָּהּ	
toward Ephrath	she bore	Rachel	she was hard	in her bearing	

They journeyed on from Bethel, and when they were still some distance from coming to Ephrath, Rachel gave birth, and she labored hard in her bearing.

Genesis 35:17

וַיְהִי	בְּהַקְשָׁתָהּ	בְּלִדְתָּהּ	וַתֹּאמֶר	לָהּ
He was	in her hardness	in her bearing	she said	to her
הַמִּלְדָּת	אֶל־תִּירְאִי	כִּי־גַם־זֶה	לָךְ	בֵּן
the midwife	do not fear	for also this	to you	son

And it happened, when her bearing was at its hardest, the midwife said to her, “Do not fear, for this one, too, is a son for you.”

Genesis 35:18

וַיְהִי	בְּצֵאתָהּ	נַפְשָׁהּ	כִּי	מָתָהּ	וַתִּקְרָא
He was	in going out of	her soul	for	she died	she called
שְׁמוֹ	בֶּן־אוֹנִי	וְאָבִיו	קָרָא־לּוֹ	בְּנִימִין	
his name	son of my vigor	and his father	he called him	Benjamin	

And it happened, when her life was giving out, for she was dying, that she called his name Ben-Oni, but his father called him Benjamin.⁶¹

Genesis 35:19

וַתָּמָת	רָחֵל	וַתִּקְבֹּר	בְּדֶרֶךְ		
She died	Rachel	she was buried	in path		
אֶפְרָתָה	הוּא	בֵּית	לֶחֶם		
toward Ephrat	he	house	bread		

⁶¹ It is heart-wrenching to think that Rachel’s last act was to give her son a name with her dying breath, only to have it ignored by her husband. Ben-Oni could be understood as “son of my pain/sorrow” or “son of my vigor” and seen as Rachel blaming her child for causing her untimely death, in which case Jacob renaming him is an act of kindness. But “son of my vigor” could also be a mother bequeathing the last of her energy unto her child as a gift, willingly sacrificing her life force for the next generation. While Jacob’s decision may have spared his son confusion and pain, it is still difficult as a reader to see Rachel’s word ignored.

Rachel died and she was buried on the road to Ephrath, that is Bethlehem.

Genesis 35:20

עַל־קִבְרָתָהּ	מַצְבָּה	יַעֲקֹב	וַיַּצֵּב
upon her grave	pillar	Jacob	He stood
עַד־כִּיּוֹם	קִבְרַת־רָחֵל	מַצְבֵּת	הוּא
until today	grave of Rachel	pillar of	he

Jacob set up a pillar upon her grave; that is the pillar of Rachel's grave to this day.⁶²

Genesis 35:21

לְמִגְדַּל־עֵדֶר	מִהֶלְאָה	אָהֳלָהּ	וַיִּט	יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַיֵּסַע
to Migdal-Eder	from out there	his tent	he stretched	Israel	He journeyed

Israel journeyed on and pitched his tent beyond Migdal-Eder.

Genesis 35:22

וַיֵּלֶךְ	הָהוּא	בָּאֶרֶץ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	בַּשָּׂכָן	וַיְהִי
he went	this	in the land	Israel	in settlement	He was
וַיִּשְׁמַע	אָבִיו	פִּילְגֶשֶׁת	אֶת־בִּלְהָהּ	וַיִּשְׁכַּב	רְאוּבֵן
he heard	his father	concubine	(to) Bilhah	he lay down	Reuben
עֶשֶׂר	שְׁנַיִם	בְּנֵי־יַעֲקֹב	וַיְהִיוּ	יִשְׂרָאֵל	
ten	two	sons of Jacob	they were	Israel	

And it happened, when Israel resided in that land, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard.⁶³ The sons of Jacob were twelve.

Genesis 35:23

רְאוּבֵן	יַעֲקֹב	בְּכֹר	לֵאָה	בְּנֵי
Reuben	Jacob	first born	Leah	Sons of
זְבֻלֹן	יִשְׁשַׁכָּר	יְהוּדָה	וְלֵוִי	וַיִּשְׁמְעוֹן
and Zebulun	and Issachar	and Judah	and Levi	and Simeon

⁶² It is interesting that Jacob built a pillar to God just 6 verses earlier, and in general erecting pillars is a theme in Jacob's story. Notably, the text does not flash forward to tell the reader that the pillar to God is present "to this day" but does so for Rachel's grave marker.

⁶³ This chapter unfolds in so many scenes that seem on their face to be disconnected, but I cannot help but wonder if we are meant to draw lessons from the succession of events. In the Book of Samuel, for example, King David sleeps with Bathsheba and shortly thereafter Amnon rapes Tamar, leading many to see David's misdeeds as a turning point that kicked off the disintegration of his family. Similarly, there is something wrong with the way Jacob buried Rachel (a regret he carried to his deathbed, examined in chapter 1 of this thesis) and shortly thereafter Reuben lies with Bilhah, an act of sexual impropriety and a possible power play. Genesis 35 may start out with a strong Jacob, reasserting his bond with God, but it includes so much loss and wrongdoing, one cannot help but think something is amiss. The connections between Jacob and David go even further, because both Avshalom and Adonijah attempt to use sexual relations with David's women as part of power grabs.

The sons of Leah: Jacob's firstborn Reuben, and Simeon and Levi, and Judah, and Issachar, and Zebulun.

Genesis 35:24

וּבְנֵימָן	יוֹסֵף	רָחֵל	בְּנֵי
and Benjamin	Joseph	Rachel	Sons of

The sons of Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

Genesis 35:25

וּבְנֵי	בִּלְהָהּ	שִׁפְחָתָהּ	רָחֵל	דָּן	וְנַפְתָּלִי
And sons of	Bilhah	maid-servant	Rachel	Dan	and Naftali

And the sons of Bilhah, Rachel's maidservant: Dan and Naftali.

Genesis 35:26

וּבְנֵי	זִלְפָּה	שִׁפְחָתָהּ	לֵאָה	גָּד	וְאָשֵׁר	אֵלֶּה
And sons of	Zilpah	maid-servant	Leah	Gad	and Asher	these
בְּנֵי	יַעֲקֹב	אֲשֶׁר	יָלַדְלָו	בְּפַדָּן	אָרָם	
sons of	Jacob	which	born to him	in Paddan	Aram	

And the sons of Zilpah, Leah's maidservant: Gad and Asher. These were the sons of Jacob that were born to him in Paddan-Aram.

Genesis 35:27

וַיָּבֹא	יַעֲקֹב	אֶל־יִצְחָק	אָבִיו	מִמָּרָא	קִרְיַת
He came	Jacob	to Isaac	his father	from Mamre	town of
הָאַרְבַּע	הוא	חֶבְרֹון	אֲשֶׁר־גֵּר־שָׁם	אַבְרָהָם	וְיִצְחָק
the four	he	Hebron	which lives there	Abraham	and Isaac

Jacob came to Isaac his father at Mamre, Kiryat-Arba, that is Hebron, where Abraham and Isaac sojourned.

Genesis 35:28

יְהִיוּ	יָמָיו	יִצְחָק	מֵאֵת	שָׁנָה	וּשְׁמִנִים	שָׁנָה
They were	days of	Isaac	one hundred	year	and eighty	year

And Isaac's days were one hundred and eighty years.

Genesis 35:29

וַיָּגוּעַ	יִצְחָק	וַיָּמָת	וַיֵּאָסֶף	אֶל־עַמּוּיוֹ	זָקֵן	וַשְׂבַּע
He expired	Isaac	he died	he was gathered	to his people	old	and sated
יָמָיו	וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	אֵלָיו	עֵשָׂו	וַיַּעֲקֹב	בָּנָיו	
days	they buried	to him	Esau	and Jacob	his sons	

Isaac expired and he died, and he was gathered to his people, old and sated with days; and they buried him, Esau and Jacob, his sons.⁶⁴

Jeremiah 31:15

כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	קוֹל	בְּרָמָה	נִשְׁמָע
Thus	he said	YHVH	voice	in Ramah	it is heard
נָהִי	בְּכִי	תַּמְרוּלִים	רָחֵל	מִבְּכָה	עַל-בָּנֶיהָ
wailing	cry	bitterness	Rachel	from her cry	upon her children
מֵאֵנָה	לֹהֲנָתָם	עַל-בָּנֶיהָ	כִּי	אֵינָם	
she refuses	to be consoled	upon her children	for	there are none	

Thus said YHVH:

A voice is heard in Ramah,

Wailing, bitter weeping,

Rachel weeps over her children,⁶⁵

She refuses to be consoled over her children,

For they are no more.

Jeremiah 31:16

כֹּה	אָמַר	יְהוָה	מִנְעִי	קוֹלִי	מִבְּכִי
Thus	he said	YHVH	withhold	your voice	from crying
וְעֵינַיִךְ	מִדְמָעָה	כִּי	יֵשׁ	שָׂכָר	
and your eyes	from tears	for	there is	reward	
לְפַעֲלֶתְךָ	נֹאֵם יְהוָה	וְשָׁבוּ	מֵאֶרֶץ	אֹיֵב	
to your work	utters YHVH	they will return	from land	enemy	

Thus said YHVH:

Hold back your voice from weeping,

And your eyes from tears,

For there is a reward for your labor, declares YHVH,

They shall return from the enemy's land.

Jeremiah 31:17

וְיִשְׁ-תִּקְנָה	לְאַחֲרֵיתֶךָ	נֹאֵם יְהוָה	וְשָׁבוּ	בָנִים	לְגִבּוֹלָם
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⁶⁴ Again, comparing Rachel's death with another in this chapter, so much is missing. One can attribute many of these differences to gender, because women do not receive the same treatment as men when they die in the biblical narrative (with the possible exception of Sarah, whose death is marked in significant ways by both Abraham and Isaac). Still, reading these losses back-to-back reminds a reader that Rachel did not have the chance to grow old or be gathered to her people, and the text is vague about who buried her body. Her life was not one lived to completion, and her death does not (and maybe cannot) cause the same reconciliation or sense of closure as Isaac's.

⁶⁵ The burial place of Deborah contained the word "weeping" but nowhere are we told Rachel's family wept for her. This passage in Jeremiah gives expression to the pain of loss, but flips it on its head both by locating it in Rachel herself and then by reassuring her that her weeping will turn into joy.

to their border	your sons	they will return	utters YHVH	to your future	And there is hope
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And there is hope for your future, declares YHVH,
Your children shall return to their territory.

Translation: Er's Death and Levirate Marriage
Genesis 38:1-30; Deuteronomy 25:5-10

Genesis 38:1

מֵאֵת	יְהוּדָה	וַיֵּרֶד	הַהוּא	בְּעֵת	וַיְהִי
from	Judah	he went down	that	in the time	And it was
חִירָה	וּשְׁמוֹ	עַדְלָמִי	עַד־אִישׁ	וַיִּט	אֶתְיוֹ
Hirah	and his name	Adullamite	until man	he stretched	his brothers

And it happened at that time that Judah went down from his brothers and pitched [his tent] by an Adullamite man whose name was Hirah.

Genesis 38:2

וּשְׁמוֹ	כְּנַעֲנִי	בִת־אִישׁ	יְהוּדָה	וַיֵּרָא־שָׁם
and his name	Canaanite	daughter man	Judah	He saw there
אֵלֶיהָ	וַיָּבֹא	וַיִּקְחָהּ	שׁוּעָה	
to her	he came	he took her	Shua	

There Judah saw the daughter of a Canaanite man whose name was Shua, and he took her and came into⁶⁶ her.

Genesis 38:3

עַר	אֶת־שְׁמוֹ	וַיִּקְרָא	בֶּן	וַתֵּלֶד	וַתַּהַר
Er	(to) his name	he called	son	she bore	She conceived

She conceived and she bore a son, and he called⁶⁷ his name Er.

Genesis 38:4

אוֹנָן	אֶת־שְׁמוֹ	וַתִּקְרָא	בֶּן	וַתֵּלֶד	עוֹד	וַתַּהַר
Onan	(to) his name	she called	son	she bore	again	She conceived

She conceived again and she bore a son, and she called⁶⁸ his name Onan.

Genesis 38:5

אֶת־שְׁמוֹ	וַתִּקְרָא	בֶּן	וַתֵּלֶד	עוֹד	וַתִּסָּף
(to) his name	she called	son	she bore	again	She increased
אֶתָּו	בְּלִדְתָּהּ	בְּכִזְיָב	וְהָיָה	שְׁלָה	

⁶⁶ “came into” is repeated many times throughout this story (Gen 38:8, 9, 16, 18), centered as it is on sexual encounters and progeny. While the text is not explicit here about a marriage contract, it is implied that this act of “coming into” a woman is marital consummation, as the daughter of Shua is called Judah’s wife in Gen 38:12, making this a proper and socially sanctioned sexual encounter. Those who come into Tamar, both Onan and Judah, do so in ways that violate social norms and expectations.

⁶⁷ This is the one instance in which Judah names a son. His wife names his other two sons, Onan and Shelah. When Perez and Zerah are born, the singular male form of the verb קרא is used, but because there is no indication Judah is present at their birth and all related exclamations come from the midwife, it is better read as the impersonal “his name was called.”

⁶⁸ Given that Judah’s wife is herself unnamed, it is heartening to at least see her naming two of her children.

to him	in her bearing	in Chezib	and he was	Shelah
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And she increased again, and she bore a son, and she called his name Shelah; he was at Chezib⁶⁹ when she bore him.

Genesis 38:6

וַיִּקַּח	יְהוּדָה	אִשָּׁה	לְעֵר	בְּכוֹרָו	וּשְׁמָהּ	תָּמָר
He took	Judah	woman	to Er	his firstborn	and her name	Tamar

Judah took a wife for Er his firstborn, and her name was Tamar.⁷⁰

Genesis 38:7

וַיְהִי	עֵר	בְּכוֹר	יְהוּדָה	רָע
And he was	Er	firstborn	Judah	evil
בְּעֵינֵי	יְהוָה	וַיָּמָתוּ	יְהוָה	יְהוָה
in the eyes of	YHWH	he killed him	YHWH	YHWH

But Er, Judah's firstborn, was evil⁷¹ in the eyes of YHWH, so YHWH put him to death.

Genesis 38:8

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוּדָה	לְאוֹנָן	בָּא	אֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ	אֶחָיוֹ
He said	Judah	to Onan	come	to wife of	your brother
וַיִּבֶם	אֵתָהּ	וַיִּקְּם	זָרַע	לְאֶחָיוֹ	
perform levirate duty	to her	raise up	seed	to your brother	

Then, Judah said to Onan, "Come into your brother's wife and do your duty as brother-in-law to her, and raise up seed for your brother."

Genesis 38:9

וַיַּדַּע	אוֹנָן	כִּי	לֹא	לּוֹ	יְהִיָּה
He knew	Onan	for	no	to him	it will be
הַזָּרַע	וְהִיא	אִם־בָּא	אֶל־אִשְׁתּוֹ	אֶחָיו	
the seed	it was	if he came	to wife of	his brother	
וַשְׁתָּהּ	אֶרְצָהּ	לְבִלְתִּי	נָתַן־זָרַע	לְאֶחָיו	
he spoiled	to the ground	except	he gave seed	to his brother	

⁶⁹ It is unclear why Judah's location is noted in this verse but not the others. Perhaps Judah was present for the birth of his first two sons but not the third. Might this indicate that he initially took his third son for granted? Might it indicate that he was less connected to Shelah at first? If so, it is a bitter irony that Er and Onan died, as well as their mother, leaving Judah with only Shelah and making him that much more precious to his father.

⁷⁰ Tamar is given a name immediately and independent of her father or her people, while Judah's wife is only called the daughter of Shua and identified as a Canaanite. This difference for Tamar is fitting in some ways because, even though she goes back to the house of her father temporarily, he does not appear to have power over her actions or the ability to protect her from Judah.

⁷¹ There is no explanation given in the text itself as to why Er was judged as evil by God, but this same word רָע will reoccur with Onan in Gen 38:10.

But Onan knew that the seed would not be his, and so when he came into his brother's wife he would waste his seed on the ground, so as not to give seed to his brother.

Genesis 38:10

וַיֵּרָע	בְּעֵינֵי	יְהוָה	אֲשֶׁר	עָשָׂה	וַיָּמָת	גַּם־אֵתּוֹ
He was evil	in the eyes of	YHWH	which	he did	he killed	also to him

That which he did was evil in the eyes of YHWH, so God put him to death also.

Genesis 38:11

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוּדָה	לְתָמָר	כִּלְתּוֹ	שָׁבִי	דְּוֵל
He said	Judah	to Tamar	his daughter-in-law	dwelt	
אֶלמָנָה	בֵּית־אָבִיךָ	עַד־יִגְדֹּל	שֶׁלָּה	בְּנִי	מִיֶּשֶׁב
widow	house of your father	until he grows	Shelah	my son	in her father's house
כִּי	אָמַר	פֶּן־יָמוּת	גַּם־הוּא	לְאֶחָיו	דְּוֵל
for	he said	lest he will die	also he	as his brothers	dwelt
וַתֵּלֶךְ	תָּמָר	וַתֵּשֶׁב	בֵּית	אָבִיהָ	דְּוֵל
she went	Tamar	she dwelled	house	her father	in her father's house

Judah said to Tamar his daughter-in-law, "Stay a widow in your father's house⁷² until Shelah my son grows," for he said [to himself], "Lest he, too, will die like his brothers." So, Tamar went and stayed in her father's house.

Genesis 38:12

וַיִּרְבוּ	הַיָּמִים	וַתָּמָת	בַּת־שׁוּעַ	אֵשֶׁת־יְהוּדָה	דְּוֵל
They became great	the days	and she died	daughter of Shua	wife of Judah	dwelt
וַיִּנְחָם	יְהוּדָה	וַיָּעַל	עַל־גִּזְזֵי	צֹאנוֹ	דְּוֵל
consolation	Judah	he went up	upon shearers	his sheep	dwelt
הוּא	וַחֲבִירָה	רַעְיוֹ	הָעֲדֻלְמִי	תִּמְנָה	דְּוֵל
he	and Hirah	his friend	the Adullamite	Timnah	dwelt

Many days passed, and Shua's daughter, Judah's wife, died; Judah was consoled,⁷³ and he went up to his sheepshearers, he and Hirah his friend, the Adullamite, to Timnah.

⁷² This instruction creates an extremely unfair situation for Tamar. If Judah expects to exert control over Tamar, her sexuality, and her ability to marry, presumably she should live in his house under his physical and financial protection. By sending Tamar back to her father's house, he is benefitting from the protection and care offered by her family of origin while limiting her options to remarry and have children. The fact that he later orders her to be burned further demonstrates how completely Judah believes he owns Tamar, expecting to exercise full authority while accepting none of his obligations.

⁷³ מ.נ.ח./consolation never arises in relation to Tamar's loss and grief. There is no discussion about Tamar's emotional state, her connection to Er, or how she felt about the experience of losing two husband-figures. (Though Naomi's emotional state is made clear in the Book of Ruth, which is linked in many ways to this story, and can be seen as a different iteration of the same basic problem but told primarily from women's perspectives).

Genesis 38:13

וַיִּגַּד	לְתַמָּר	לֵאמֹר	הִנֵּה	חַמִּיר
It was told	to Tamar	saying	behold	your father-in-law
עָלָה	תִּמְנָה	לְגַז	צֹאֵן	
he goes up	to Timnah	to shear	his sheep	

This was told⁷⁴ to Tamar, saying, “Behold, your father-in-law is going up to Timnah to shear his sheep.”

Genesis 38:14

וַתִּסְרֶה	בְּגָדֶיהָ	אֶל־מְנוּתָהּ	מֵעָלֶיהָ	וַתִּכְסֶה	בְּצַעֲרֶיהָ
She removed	clothes of	her widowhood	from upon her	she concealed	in the veil
וַתִּתְעַלֶּה	וַתֵּשֶׁב	בְּפֶתַח	עֵינַיִם	אֲשֶׁר	
she covered herself	she sat	in opening	Enaim	which	
עַל־דֶּרֶךְ	תִּמְנָה	כִּי	רָאָתָהּ	כִּי־גִדֵּל	
upon path	to Timnah	for	she saw	for he grew	
שֶׁלָּה	וְהוּא	לֹא־נָתַנָּהּ	לּוֹ	לְאִשָּׁה	
Shelah	and she	no give her	to him	to wife	

So, she removed the clothes of her widowhood from upon herself, and she concealed and covered herself with a veil, and she sat at the entrance to Enaim, which is on the road to Timnah; for she saw that Shelah had grown but she had not been given to him as wife.⁷⁵

Genesis 38:15

וַיִּרְאֶה	יְהוּדָה	וַיַּחְשְׁבֶהָ	לְזוֹנָה	כִּי	כִסְתָּהּ	פָּנֶיהָ
He saw her	Judah	he thought her	to whore	for	she concealed	her face

Judah saw her and he thought her a whore, for she had concealed her face.⁷⁶

Genesis 38:16

וַיִּט	אֵלֶיהָ	אֶל־דֶּרֶךְ	וַיֹּאמֶר	הִבֵּה־נָא	אָבוֹא
He stretched	to her	to the path	he said	let please	I will come
אֵלָיו	כִּי	לֹא	יָדַע	כִּי	כָלְתּוֹ

⁷⁴ Both in this verse and in Gen 38:24 information is relayed by an anonymous source. The same is true in Gen 48:1, part of Jacob’s story, when an anonymous person tells Joseph his father is dying.

⁷⁵ Note the order of this verse; in the first cola the reader sees Tamar act in a duplicitous way and only in the second cola is the explanation given that Tamar understands Shelah is being improperly withheld from her. In a way, this can be seen as foreshadowing Judah rushing to action when he hears Tamar has become pregnant and only afterward understanding that he is responsible for her pregnancy and the uncommon means by which she conceived. This method of storytelling adds a bit of suspense in each case, even when the reader had the background information all along that Judah would withhold Shelah (Gen 38:11) and Tamar conceived by Judah (Gen 38:18).

⁷⁶ While the reason for Judah’s misunderstanding is clear, this verse emphasizes the larger pattern of Judah not truly seeing Tamar or making any effort to see her needs or perspective. This is further emphasize by the place name *petach enayim*, literally “open the eyes.”

his daughter-in-law	for	he knew	no	for	to you
הוא	ותאמר	מה־תתן־לי	כי	תבוא	אלי
she	she said	what you will give to me	for	you will come	to me

He turned aside to her by the road and he said, “Here, please, let me come into you,” for he did not know that she was his daughter-in-law. She said, “What will you give me for coming into me?”

Genesis 38:17

ואמר	אנכי	אשלח	גדי־עזים	מן־הצאן
He said	I	I will send	kid goat	from the flock
ותאמר	אם־תתן	ערבון	עד	שלחך
she said	if you will give	pledge	until	you sent it

He said, “I personally will send a kid-goat from the flock.” But she said, “Only if you give a pledge until you send it.”

Genesis 38:18

וַיֹּאמֶר	מָה	הָעֶרְבוֹן	אֲשֶׁר	אֶתֶּן־לְךָ	וַתֹּאמֶר
He said	what	the pledge	which	I will give to you	she said
חֲתָמְךָ	וּפְתִילְךָ	וּמֶטֶךְ	אֲשֶׁר	בְּיָדְךָ	
your seal	your cord	your staff	which	in your hand	
וַיִּתֵּן־לָהּ	וַיָּבֵא	אֵלֶיהָ	וַתֵּהָרֵם	לּוֹ	
he gave to her	he came	to her	she conceived	to him	

He said, “What pledge shall I give to you?” And she said, “Your seal and your cord, and your staff that are in your hand.” So, he gave them to her, and he came into her, and she conceived by him.⁷⁷

Genesis 38:19

ותקם	ותלך	ותסר	צעירה
She arose	she went	she removed	her veil
מעליה	ותלבש	בגדי	אלמנותה
from upon her	she dressed	in clothes of	her widowhood

Then, she arose and went, and she removed her veil from upon herself and dressed in the clothes of her widowhood.

Genesis 38:20

⁷⁷ The conception is immediate and, given the role that God was understood to play in pregnancy in the ancient world, this can be seen as approval of Tamar’s unorthodox behavior. It is also important to note the inclusion of the word לו “by him” which could be seen as grammatically superfluous. The text is careful to protect Tamar’s honor and righteousness every step of the way. She may have played the whore, but Tamar undoubtedly was impregnated by Judah, she immediately rose and removed her disguise (Gen 38:19) and so she lay with no other man, and once the scheme was revealed, it is explicitly stated that she had no more relations with her father-in-law (Gen 38:26). Tamar acted out of necessity to right an injustice, and there is no room to question her motivation or character.

וַיִּשְׁלַח	יְהוּדָה	אֶת־גִּדִּי	הַעֲזִים	בְּיָד	רֵעֵהוּ	הַעֲדֹלָמִי
He sent	Judah	to kid	the goats	in hand	his friend	the Adullamite
לְקַחַת	הָעֶרְבוֹן	מִיָּד	הָאִשָּׁה	וְלֹא	מִצָּאָהּ	
to take	the pledge	from hand	the woman	and no	he found her	

Judah sent the kid-goat by the hand of his friend the Adullamite to take back the pledge from the hand of the woman, but he did not find her.

Genesis 38:21

וַיִּשְׁאַל	אֶת־אֲנָשֵׁי	מְקוֹמָהּ	לֵאמֹר	אֵינָהּ	הַקְדֵּשָׁה	הוּא
He asked	(to) people of	her place	saying	where	the temple prostitute	she
בְּעֵינָיִם	עַל־הַדֶּרֶךְ	וַיֹּאמְרוּ	לֹא־הִיְתָה	בְּזֶה	קְדֻשָּׁה	
in the eyes	upon the path	they said	no she was	in this	temple prostitute	

So, he asked the people of the place, saying, “Where is the temple prostitute, she who was at Enaim by the road?” They said, “There was no temple prostitute here.”

Genesis 38:22

וַיָּשָׁב	אֶל־יְהוּדָה	וַיֹּאמֶר	לֹא	מִצָּאתֶיהָ	וְגַם	
He returned	to Judah	he said	no	I found her	and also	
אֲנָשֵׁי	הַמְּקוֹם	אָמְרוּ	לֹא־הִיְתָה	בְּזֶה	קְדֻשָּׁה	
people	the place	they said	no she was	in this	temple prostitute	

He returned to Judah and said, “I could not find her, and what is more, the people of the place said, ‘There was no temple prostitute here.’”

Genesis 38:23

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוּדָה	תִּקַּח־לָהּ	פֶּן	נִהְיֶה	לְבוֹז	הִנֵּה
He said	Judah	she will take it	lest	we will be	as insignificant	behold
שְׁלַחְתִּי	הַגִּדִּי	הַזֶּה	וְאַתָּה	לֹא	מִצָּאתָהּ	
I sent	the kid	this	and you	no	he found her	

So, Judah said, “Let her take it, lest we become a laughingstock. Behold, I sent this kid,⁷⁸ but you could not find her.”

Genesis 38:24

וַיְהִי	כַּמִּשְׁלָשׁ	חֳדָשִׁים	וַיִּגַּד	לְיְהוּדָה	לֵאמֹר	
It was	as three	months	and it was told	to Judah	saying	
זָנְתָהּ	תָּמָר	כְּלִתָּךְ	וְגַם	הִנֵּה	הִרָּה	
she whored	Tamar	your daughter-in-law	and also	behold	she is pregnant	

⁷⁸ I wonder if there may be some irony and wordplay in this part of the verse. Judah is so high-and-mighty that he sent .ו.ל.ש the kid, attempting to fulfill his promise to an unknown whore. He does not realize that he should be ashamed that he did not give שלה Shelah to Tamar, a woman he knows and for whom he is supposed to be responsible. The slight play on words between *salahti* and *Shelah* can be replicated in English in a way: he is so proud of sending an animal kid but does not realize he should have sent his human kid.

לְזוֹנוֹתִים	וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוּדָה	הוֹצִיָּאָהּ	וַתִּשְׂרֹף
to prostitution	he said	Judah	bring her out	burn her

And it happened about three months [later] that Judah was told, saying, “Tamar your daughter-in-law whored, and what is more, behold, she conceived from her whoring!” Judah said, “Bring her out to be burned!”⁷⁹

Genesis 38:25

קוֹא	מוֹצֵאת	וְהִיא	שָׁלְחָהּ	אֶל-חָמֶיהָ	לֵאמֹר
She	was brought out	and she	she sent	to her father-in-law	saying
לְאִישׁ	אֲשֶׁר-אֵלֶּהָ	לּוֹ	אֲנִי	הָרָה	וַתֹּאמֶר
to man	which these	to him	I	conceived	she said
הַכִּרְיָנָא	לְמִי	הַחֲתָמָת	וְהַפְּתִילִים	וְהַמַּטֵּה	הָאֵלֶּה
recognize please	to who	the seal	and the cord	and the staff	these

She was brought out, and she sent to her father-in-law, saying, “By the man to whom these [belong] I conceived.” Then, she said, “Recognize, please,⁸⁰ whose seal and cord and staff are these?”

Genesis 38:26

וַיִּכַּר	יְהוּדָה	וַיֹּאמֶר	צְדָקָהּ	מִמֶּנִּי	כִּי-עַל-כֵּן
He recognized	Judah	he said	she is righteous	from me	for upon yes
לֹא-נָתַתִּיהָ	לְשֵׁלָה	בְּנִי	וְלֹא-יָסַף	עוֹד	לִדְעוֹתָהּ
no I gave her	to Shelah	my son	and no increased	again	to know her

Judah recognized, and he said, “She is more righteous than I, for I have not given her to Shelah my son.” And he knew her again no more.

Genesis 38:27

וַיְהִי	בְּעֵת	לִדְתָהּ	וַהֲבִינָהּ	תְּאוֹמִים	בְּבֶטְנָהּ
And it was	in time	her bearing	and behold	twins	in her womb

And it happened, at the time she gave birth, that behold, there were twins in her womb!

Genesis 38:28

וַיְהִי	בְּלִדְתָהּ	וַיִּתֵּן-יָד	וַתִּקַּח	הַמִּילְדָּת	וַתִּקְשֹׁר
And it was	in her bearing	he gave hand	she took	the midwife	she bound
עַל-יָדוֹ	שָׁנִי	לֵאמֹר	זֶה	יָצָא	רֵאשִׁי
upon his hand	crimson	saying	this	came out	first

⁷⁹ As noted in the footnote to Gen 38:11, the fact that Judah feels entitled to exercise this level of control over Tamar is baffling, given that he sent her back to her father’s house. The immediacy and severity of his reaction is also suspect, indicating to me less that he is scandalized by her actions and more that he now has a convenient excuse to dispatch a problem he has faced since Onan died. He never wanted to give Shelah to Tamar in marriage, viewing her as the cause of his sons’ deaths, and he finally has a way to solve that problem and save face.

⁸⁰ As respectful as the language is here, Tamar becomes a powerful figure with this command. She tells Judah to “recognize” and the first word of the following verse is וַיִּכַּר “he recognized.”

And it happened, when she gave birth, that one put out a hand⁸¹ and the midwife took it and bound a crimson [thread] on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.”

Genesis 38:29

וַתֹּאמֶר	אָחִיו	יָצָא	וַהֲנֶה	יָדוֹ	כַּמְשִׁיב	וַיְהִי
she said	his brother	he came out	and behold	his hand	as returned	And it was
פֶּרֶץ	שְׁמוֹ	וַיִּקְרָא	פֶּרֶץ	עָלֶיךָ	מִה־פְּרִצָּת	
Perez	his name	he called	breached	upon you	what you breached	

And it happened that as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out, and she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” So, his name was called Perez.

Genesis 38:30

עַל־יָדוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	אָחִיו	יָצָא	וְאַחֲרָי
upon his hand	which	his brother	he went out	And after
זֶרַח	שְׁמוֹ	וַיִּקְרָא	הַשָּׁנִי	
Zerah	his name	he called	the crimson	

And after, his brother came out, on whose hand was the crimson [thread]; his name was called Zerah.

Deuteronomy 25:5

אֶחָד	וּמֵת	יַחְדָּו	אֲחִים	כִּי־יֵשְׁבוּ
one	and he dies	together	brothers	For they dwell
אִשְׁת־הַמֵּת	לֹא־תִהְיֶה	אֵין־לּוֹ	וּבֶן	מֵהֶם
wife of the dead	no she shall be	there is not to him	and son	from them
יָבֵא	יְבִמָּהּ	זָר	לְאִישׁ	הַחוּצָה
he will come	her brother-in-law	stranger	to man	the outside
וַיַּבְמָהּ	לְאִשָּׁה	לּוֹ	וּלְקַחָהּ	עָלֶיהָ
perform levirate duty	to woman	to him	and take her	upon her

When brothers dwell together and one of them dies and he does not have a son, the wife of the dead shall not become an outsider, [given] to a man who is a stranger; her brother-in-law shall come upon⁸² her and take her to him as wife and do his duty as a brother-in-law to her.

⁸¹ יָד is repeated 5 times in this story (Gen 38:18, 20, 28, 29, 30), each time related to identity and power.

Tamar asks for the staff in Judah’s hand, Judah seeks his identity markers back from her hand, and Zerah’s hand was used to identify him after being born and was his attempt at becoming the firstborn.

⁸² Interesting that the preposition על is used instead of אל, given that בא אל is repeated so often in the Judah story and is a common biblical phrase for engaging in sexual intercourse. Here the phrase is followed by two other steps, taking her as wife and doing his duty as brother-in-law, so perhaps בא על indicates a broader set of commitments and responsibilities toward his brother’s widow than simply engaging in sex to produce offspring.

Deuteronomy 25:6

וְהָיָה	הַבְּכוֹר	אֲשֶׁר	תֵּלֵד	יָקוּם	עַל־שֵׁם
It will be	the firstborn	which	she will bear	will rise up	upon name
אָחִיו	הַמֵּת	וְלֹא־יִמָּחָה	שְׁמוֹ	מִיִּשְׂרָאֵל	
his brother	the dead	and not wipe out	his name	from Israel	

And it shall be that the firstborn that she bears shall establish the name of his dead brother, that his name shall not be wiped out from Israel.

Deuteronomy 25:7

וְאִם־לֹא	יִחַפֵּץ	הָאִישׁ	לִקְחָתָהּ	אֶת־יְבִמְתּוֹ	
And if no	he will delight in	the man	to take	(to) his sister-in-law	
וְעָלְתָהּ	יְבִמְתּוֹ	הַשַּׁעֲרָה	אֶל־הַזְּקֵנִים	וְאָמְרָה	
she will go up	his sister-in-law	the gate	to the elders	and she will say	
מֵאֵן	יְבָמִי	לִהְיוֹתִי	לְאָחִיו	שֵׁם	
refuse	my brother-in-law	to stand up	to his brother	name	
בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	לֹא	אָבָה	יְבָמִי		
in Israel	no	willing	perform levirate duty		

But if the man does not desire to take his sister-in-law,⁸³ his sister-in-law shall go up to the gate to the elders and say, “My brother-in-law refused to stand up his brother’s name in Israel, he is not willing to do his duty as a brother-in-law.”

Deuteronomy 25:8

וְקָרְאוּ־לּוֹ	זִקְנֵי־עִירָו	וְדִבְּרוּ	אֵלָיו	וְעָמַד	
They will call to him	elders of the city	they will speak	to him	he will stand	
וְאָמַר	לֹא	חִפְּצָתִי	לִקְחָתָהּ		
he will say	no	I delighted	to take her		

Then, the elders of the city shall call him and speak to him,⁸⁴ but [if] he stands and says, “I do not desire to take her,”⁸⁵

Deuteronomy 25:9

⁸³ No reason needs to be given, and the text does not indicate the motives of the brother, whether they be related to his dislike of his sister-in-law, concern for his own financial stability, or something else. Also, after just 2 verses laying out a general rule, the text turns quite quickly to the case of a person not wanting to follow the protocol. There seems to be discomfort with this law from the outset, and hence an approved way to circumvent its implementation.

⁸⁴ It is not clear what the elders are attempting to do when speaking with the brother, whether to ascertain his reasons, persuade him to act differently, clarify the rules to the broader community, or something else.

⁸⁵ Note that this man does not say anything about his deceased brother, only his sister-in-law. Perhaps the text is acknowledging here that the person with the greatest stake in his actions is in fact the childless woman who needs offspring in order to be provided for and protected as she ages. Or perhaps the established system is treating the man with some gentleness by not making him speak about his deceased brother directly and only focusing on the way he is rejecting his sister-in-law.

וְנָגְשָׁה	יְבִמְתּוֹ	אֵלָיו	לְעֵינֵי	הַזְקֵנִים
She will draw near	his sister-in-law	to him	in the eyes of	the elders
וְחָלְצָה	נָעֻלוֹ	מֵעָלָיו	רַגְלָיו	וְיִרְקָה
remove	his sandal	from upon	his foot	spit
בְּפָנָיו	וְעָנְתָהּ	וְאָמְרָה	כֵּכָה	יַעֲשֶׂה
in his face	she will answer	she will say	like this	he will do
לְאִישׁ	אֲשֶׁר	לֹא יִבְנֶה	אֶת־בֵּית	אָחִיו
to the man	which	no he builds	(to) house	his brother

Then, his sister-in-law shall draw near to him, in the eyes of the elders, and remove his sandal from upon his foot and spit in his face and testify and say, “Thus shall be done to the man who will not build his brother’s house.”

Deuteronomy 25:10

וְנִקְרָא	שְׁמוֹ	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	בֵּית	חֲלוּץ	הַנָּעֹל
He shall be called	his name	in Israel	house	remove	the sandal

And his name shall be called in Israel: the house of the removed sandal.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ This man would not build up the name of his brother, and as a punishment his own name is changed. Still, the severity of this punishment is unclear, as is its enforcement. No man who refuses his duty as a levir (Onan or Naomi’s relative) are referred to in this way; however, Naomi’s relative does lose his name entirely from the record.

Translation: Jonathan's Death

I Samuel 20:11-16, 23, 42; I Samuel 31:1-13; II Samuel 1:1-27, II Samuel 21:12-14

I Samuel 20:11

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹנָתָן	אֶל-דָּוִד	לֵךְ	וְנָצָא
He said	Jonathan	to David	go	we will go out
הַשָּׂדֶה	וַיֵּצְאוּ	שְׁנֵיהֶם	הַשָּׂדֶה	
the field	they went out	two of them	the field	

Jonathan said to David, "Come, let us go out to the field." And the two of them went out to the field.

I Samuel 20:12

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹנָתָן	אֶל-דָּוִד	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֵי	יִשְׂרָאֵל
He said	Jonathan	to David	YHWH	God of	Israel
כִּי-אֶחְקֹר	אֶת-אָבִי	כַּעַת	מָחָר	הַשְּׁלִישִׁית	וְהִנֵּה-טוֹב
for I will search	(to) my father	at the time	tomorrow	the third	and behold good
אֶל-דָּוִד	וְלֹא-אֵל	אֲשַׁלַּח	אֵלֶיךָ	וְגִלִּיתִי	אֶת-אָזְנוֹךָ
to David	and no then	I will send	to you	I will uncover	(to) your ears

Then, Jonathan said to David, "By YHWH, God of Israel, I will search out my father at this time tomorrow [or] on the third day and see if he is favorable toward David; if not, I will send to you and reveal it in your hearing.

I Samuel 20:13

כֹּה-יַעֲשֶׂה	יְהוָה	לִיהוֹנָתָן	וְכֵן	יֹסִיף
Thus he will do	YHWH	to Jonathan	and thus	he will add
כִּי-יִטֵּב	אֶל-אָבִי	אֶת-הָרָעָה	עָלֶיךָ	וְגִלִּיתִי
for it will be good	to my father	(to) the evil	upon you	I will uncover
אֶת-אָזְנוֹךָ	וְשִׁלַּחְתִּיךָ	וְהָלַכְתָּ	לְשָׁלוֹם	וַיְהִי
(to) your ears	I will send you	you will go	to peace	and it will be
יְהוָה	עִמָּךְ	כַּאֲשֶׁר	הָיָה	עִם-אָבִי
YHWH	with you	as	it was	with my father

"Thus may YHWH do to Jonathan⁸⁷ and more, if it is good to my father [to bring] evil upon you, I will reveal it in your hearing, and I will send you off and you shall go in peace; YHWH shall be with you as He was with my father.

I Samuel 20:14

וְלֹא	אִם-עוֹדֵנִי	חִי	וְלֹא-תַעֲשֶׂה	עִמָּדִי
And no	if I would yet	live	and no make	with me
חֲסֹד	יְהוָה	וְלֹא	אֲמוֹת	

⁸⁷ Note the formality of Jonathan's speech, referring to David and himself by name in verses 12 and 13, and invoking YHWH by name in every single verse. This is a formal and serious vow, one in which he agrees to collaborate with his dearest friend who is also his most significant rival. As David's ascent threatens Jonathan's family, he at least manages to secure his own line through an exchange of loyalty and pledges.

I will die	and no	YHWH	loving-kindness
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“And while I yet live, you will not fail to show me the loving-kindness of YHWH, nor when I die,

I Samuel 20:15

וְלֹא־תִכְרֹת	אֶת־חַסְדְּךָ	מֵעַם	בֵּיתִי	עַד־עוֹלָם	וְלֹא	בַּחֲכֹת
And no cut	(to) your loving-kindness	from with	my house	forever	and no	in the cut
יְהוָה	אֶת־אֹיְבֵי	דָּוִד	אִישׁ	מֵעַל	פָּנַי	הָאֲדָמָה
YHWH	(to) enemies	David	man	from upon	face of	the soil

“And you will not cut off my house from your loving-kindness forever, not even when YHWH has cut off all the enemies of David, to a man, from upon the face of the earth.

I Samuel 20:16

וַיִּכְרֹת	יְהוֹנָתָן	עִם־בֵּית	דָּוִד	וַיִּבְקֹשׁ
He cut	Jonathan	with house	David	and he sought
יְהוָה	מִיָּד	אֹיְבֵי	דָּוִד	
YHWH	from hand	enemies ⁸⁸	David	

“Thus has Jonathan cut a covenant with the house of David, and YHWH shall require it from the hand of David!”

I Samuel 20:23

וְהַדָּבָר	אֲשֶׁר	דִּבַּרְנוּ	אֲנִי	וְאַתָּה
And the thing	which	we spoke	I	and you
הִנֵּה	יְהוָה	בֵּינִי	וּבֵינְךָ	עַד־עוֹלָם ⁸⁹
behold	YHWH	between me	and between you	until forever

“And as for the matter of which we spoke, me and you, behold, YHWH is between me and you forever!”

I Samuel 20:42

וַיֹּאמֶר	יְהוֹנָתָן	לְדָוִד	לֵךְ	לְשָׁלוֹם	אֲשֶׁר
He said	Jonathan	to David	go	to peace	which
נִשְׁבַּעְנוּ	שְׁנֵינוּ	אֲנִיחֵנוּ	בְּשֵׁם	יְהוָה	

⁸⁸ I agree here with Robert Alter’s translation, leaving out the word “enemies.” He explains, “The Masoretic Text has ‘from the hand of the enemies of David,’ but the substitution of a person’s ‘enemies’ for the person himself is a common Hebrew scribal euphemism (here, so as not to say something negative about David), as both Rashi and David Kimchi recognized in the Middle Ages” (*The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, 261).

⁸⁹ Knowing that Jonathan will be struck down in battle during the prime of his life, it is moving to hear him making an eternal vow. One can imagine the poignant words עד עולם ringing in David’s ears as Jonathan leaves this world (and in a phrase developed later in the Tanach but familiar to modern readers, he will הולך לעולמו). The importance of this oath, formally but also perhaps emotionally, is clear because Jonathan’s son is kept at David’s table and David takes very seriously his obligation to protect Jonathan’s line (even as the other descendants of Saul meet gruesome ends).

YHVH	in name	we	two of us	we swore
וּבֵינְךָ	בֵּינִי	יְהִיָּה	יְהוָה	לֵאמֹר
and between you	between me	he will be	YHVH	saying
עַד-עוֹלָם	זֶרְעֶךָ	וּבֵין	זֶרְעִי	וּבֵין
until forever	your seed	and between	my seed	and between

And Jonathan said to David, “Go in peace, as the two of us, we have sworn in the name of YHVH saying, ‘May YHVH be between me and you, and between my seed and your seed, forever!’”

I Samuel 31:1

יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲנָשִׁי	וַיָּסוּ	בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל	נִלְחָמִים	וּפְלִשְׁתִּים
Israel	people of	they fled	in Israel	they made war	And Philistines
הַגִּלְבּוֹעַ	בְּהָר	חָלְלִים	וַיִּפְּלוּ	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	מִפְּנֵי
the Gilboa	on mount	slain	they fell	Philistines	from before

And the Philistines battled against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines, and they fell slain on Mount Gilboa.

I Samuel 31:2

פְּלִשְׁתִּים	וַיִּכּוּ	וְאֶת-בָּנָיו	אֶת-שָׁאוּל	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	וַיִּדְבְּקוּ
Philistines	they struck	and (to) his sons	(to) Saul	Philistines	They clung
שָׁאוּל	בָּנֵי	וְאֶת-מַלְכִּי-שׁוּעַ	וְאֶת-אַבִּינָדָב	אֶת-יְהוֹנָתָן	
Saul	sons of	and (to) Malchi-shua	and (to) Abinadab	(to) Jonathan	

The Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, sons of Saul.⁹⁰

I Samuel 31:3

הַמִּוֹרִים	וַיִּמְצְאוּהוּ	אֶל-שָׁאוּל	הַמִּלְחָמָה	וַתִּכְבֹּד
the archers	they found him	to Saul	the war	She was heavy
מִהַמִּוֹרִים	מְאֹד	וַיִּחָל	בְּקֶשֶׁת	אֲנָשִׁים
from the archers	much	he writhed	in the bow	people

The battle was heavy against Saul, and the archers, men of the bow, found him; he writhed greatly from the archers.

I Samuel 31:4

שָׁלַף	כֵּלָיו	לְבָשָׁא	שָׁאוּל	וַיֹּאמֶר
draw	his vessels	to bearer	Saul	He said

⁹⁰ It seems strange to have Saul highlighted as an individual in this scene but to have Jonathan named only once in this chapter and always presented grouped with his brothers. Interestingly, Jonathan’s name will reappear in II Samuel 1:4, but that chapter drops specific reference to Saul’s other sons who died in this battle. The focus of the author, the reader, and of David all seem slightly different in the retellings of this story.

הַעֲרִלִים	פֶּן־יָבֹאוּ	בָּהּ	וַדְּקִנֵּנִי	חֶרֶבְךָ
the uncircumcised	lest they come	in her	and pierce me	your sword
אֲבֵה	וְלֹא	וְהִתְעַלְלוּ־בִּי	וַדְּקִנֵּנִי	הָאֵלֶּה
willing	and no	they will abuse me	and pierce me	these
מְאֹד	יִרָא	כִּי	כָּלָיו	נֶשֶׂא
much	he feared	for	his vessels	bearer
עָלֶיהָ	וַיִּפֹּל	אֶת־הַחֶרֶב	שָׁאוּל	וַיִּקַּח
upon her	he fell	(to) the sword	Saul	he took

Saul said to his arms-bearer, “Draw your sword and pierce me with it, lest these uncircumcised ones pierce me and abuse me.” But his arms-bearer was not willing, for he was greatly frightened. So, Saul took the sword and fell upon it.

I Samuel 31:5

שָׁאוּל	מָת	כִּי	נֶשֶׂא־כָּלָיו	וַיִּרָא
Saul	he died	for	bearer his vessels	He saw
עִמּוֹ	וַיָּמָת	עַל־חֶרְבּוֹ	גַּם־הוּא	וַיִּפֹּל
with him	he died	upon his sword	also he	he fell

And his arms-bearer saw that Saul had died, and he fell upon his sword, and he died with him.

I Samuel 31:6

כָּלָיו	וְנֶשֶׂא	בָּנָיו	וּשְׁלֹשֶׁת	שָׁאוּל	וַיָּמָת
his vessels	and bearer	his sons	and three of	Saul	He died
יַחְדּוֹ	הַזֶּה	בַּיּוֹם	כָּל־אֲנָשָׁיו	גַּם	
together	this	on the day	all his people	also	

Saul died, and his three sons and his arms-bearer, as well as all his men, together on that day.

I Samuel 31:7

וְאֲשֶׁר	הָעֶמֶק	אֲשֶׁר־בְּעֵבֶר	אֲנָשֵׁי־יִשְׂרָאֵל	וַיִּרְאוּ
and which	the valley	which in region beyond	people of Israel	They saw
יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֲנָשֵׁי	כִּי־נָסוּ	הַיַּרְדֵּן	בְּעֵבֶר
Israel	people of	for they fled	the Jordan	in region beyond
אֶת־הָעָרִים	וַיַּעֲזְבוּ	וּבָנָיו	שָׁאוּל	וְכִי־מָתוּ
(to) the cities	they left	and his sons	Saul	and for they died
בָּהֶן	וַיִּשְׁכּוּ	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	וַיָּבֹאוּ	וַיָּנֻסוּ
in them	they dwelled	Philistines	they came	they fled

And the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and who were on the other side of the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled, and that Saul and his sons were dead; they left the towns and fled, and the Philistines dwelled in them.

I Samuel 31:8

וַיִּמְצְאוּ	אֶת־הַחֲלָלִים	לִפְשֹׁט	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	וַיָּבֹאוּ	מִמָּחָרָת	וַיְהִי
they found	(to) the slain	to strip	Philistines	they came	the day after	And it was
הַגִּלְבּוֹעַ	בְּהָר	נָפְלִים	בָּנָיו	וְאֶת־שְׁלֹשָׁת	אֶת־שָׁאוֹל	
the Gilboa	on mountain	they fell	his sons	and (to) three of	(to) Saul	

And it happened the day after that the Philistines came to strip the slain, and they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa.

I Samuel 31:9

וַיִּכְרְתוּ	אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ	וַיִּפְשְׁטוּ	אֶת־כְּלָיו	וַיִּשְׁלְחוּ	בְּאֶרֶץ־פְּלִשְׁתִּים
They cut off	(to) his head	they stripped	(to) his vessels	they sent	in land Philistines
סָבִיב	לְבַשָּׁר	בֵּית	עֲצִבֵּיהֶם	וְאֶת־הָעָם	
round about	to bear the news	house	their idols	and (to) the people	

They cut off his head and stripped him of his armor, and they sent them around the land of the Philistines to announce the news to the temples of their idols and to the people.

I Samuel 31:10

וַיִּשְׁיִמוּ	אֶת־כְּלָיו	בֵּית	עֲשֵׁתָרוֹת	וְאֶת־גּוֹיְתוֹ	
They put	(to) his vessels	house	Ashtaroth	and (to) his body	
תִּקְעוּ	בְּחוֹמַת	בֵּית	שָׁן		
they struck	in wall of	house	Shan		

They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and his body they impaled on the wall of Beth-Shan.

I Samuel 31:11

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ	אֵלָיו	יֹשְׁבֵי	יָבֵשׁ	גִּלְעָד	
They heard	to him	inhabitants of	Jabesh	Gilead	
אֵת	אֲשֶׁר־עָשָׂו	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	לְשָׁאוֹל		
(to)	which he did	Philistines	to Saul		

The inhabitants of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul,

I Samuel 31:12

וַיָּקוּמוּ	כָּל־אִישׁ	חֵיל	וַיֵּלְכוּ	כָּל־הַלַּיְלָה	
They arose	all man	might	they went	all the night	
וַיִּקְחוּ	אֶת־גּוֹיְת	שָׁאוֹל	וְאֵת	גֵּיִת	
they took	(to) body of	Saul	and (to)	bodies of	
בָּנָיו	מִחוֹמַת	בֵּית	שָׁן	וַיָּבֹאוּ	
his sons	from wall of	house	Shan	they came	
יָבֵשָׁה	וַיִּשְׂרְפוּ	אֹתָם	שָׁם		
to Jabesh	they burned	to them	there		

and every valiant man arose and walked all night, and they took Saul's body and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-Shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there.

I Samuel 31:13

וַיִּקְחוּ	אֶת־עֲצָמֵיהֶם	וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	תַּחַת־הָאֵשֶׁל
They took	(to) their bones	they buried	under the tamarisk tree
בִּיבְשָׁה	וַיֹּצְמוּ	שִׁבְעַת	יָמִים
in Jabesh	they fasted	seven	days

Then, they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

II Samuel 1:1

וַיְהִי	אַחֲרָי	מוֹת	שָׁאוּל	וַדָּוִד	שָׁב	מִהַכּוֹת
And it was	after	death	Saul	and David	he returned	from striking
אֶת־הָעַמְלִיק	וַיֵּשֶׁב	דָּוִד	בְּצִקְלָג	יָמִים	שְׁנַיִם	
(to) the Amalekites	he dwelled	David	in Ziklag	days	two	

And it happened after the death of Saul, when David returned from striking down the Amalekites, that David stayed in Ziklag two days.

II Samuel 1:2

וַיְהִי	כִּיּוֹם	הַשְּׁלִישִׁי	וַהֲנִה	אִישׁ	
And it was	on the day	the third	and behold	man	
בָּא	מִן־הַמַּחֲנֶה	מֵעִם	שָׁאוּל	וּבגָדָיו	
he came	from the camp	from with	Saul	and his clothes	
קִרְעִים	וָאֲדָמָה	עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ	וַיְהִי	בְּבָאוֹ	
they were torn	and earth	upon his head	and it was	in his coming	
אֶל־דָּוִד	וַיִּפֹּל	אֶרְצָה	וַיִּשְׁתַּחוּ		
to David	he fell	to land	he bowed down		

And it happened on the third day that, behold, a man came from the camp, from Saul, and his clothes were torn and there was earth upon his head. And it happened when he came to David that he fell to the ground and bowed down.

II Samuel 1:3

וַיֹּאמֶר	לּוֹ	דָּוִד	אֵי	מִזֶּה	תָּבוֹא
He said	to him	David	where	from this	you will come
וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	מִמַּחֲנֶה	יִשְׂרָאֵל	נִמְלַטְתִּי	
he said	to him	from camp	Israel	I escaped	

David said to him, "Where are you coming from?" And he said, "From the camp of Israel, I slipped away."

II Samuel 1:4

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	דָּוִד	מַה־הָיָה	הַדָּבָר	
He said	to him	David	what was it	the thing	

הַגִּד־נָא	לִי	וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲשֶׁר-נָס	הָעָם
tell please	to me	he said	which he fled	the people
מִן-הַמִּלְחָמָה	וְגַם-הַרְבֵּה	נָפַל	מִן-הָעָם	וַיָּמָתוּ
from the war	and also great	fell	from the people	they died
וְגַם	שָׁאוּל	וַיהוֹנָתָן	בְּנוֹ	מָתוּ
and also	Saul	and Jonathan	his son	they died

David said to him, “What was it that happened? Please, tell me.” And he said that the people had fled from the battle, and also a great many of the people have fallen and died, and also Saul and Jonathan his son died.⁹¹

II Samuel 1:5

וַיֹּאמֶר	דָּוִד	אֶל-הַנֶּעֱר	הַמְּגִיד	לּוֹ	אֵיךְ
He said	David	to the lad	the teller	to him	how
יָדַעַתְּ	כִּי-יָמָת	שָׁאוּל	וַיהוֹנָתָן	בְּנוֹ	
you knew	that died	Saul	and Jonathan	his son	

David said to the reporting lad, “How do you know that Saul died, and Jonathan his son?”⁹²

II Samuel 1:6

וַיֹּאמֶר	הַנֶּעֱר	הַמְּגִיד	לּוֹ	נִקְרָא	נִקְרִיתִי
He said	the lad	the teller	to him	it happened	I encountered
בְּהָר	הַגִּלְבֹּעַ	וַהֲנֵה	שָׁאוּל	נִשְׁעַן	עַל-חֶבְרִיתוֹ
on mountain	the Gilboa	and behold	Saul	he leaned	upon his sword
וַהֲנֵה	הַרְכָּב	וּבַעֲלֵי	הַפָּרָשִׁים	הַדְּבָקָהוּ	
and behold	the chariot	and owners	the warhorses	they clung to him	

The reporting lad said to him, “I just happened to be on Mount Gilboa and, behold, Saul was leaning upon his sword and, behold, chariot and horsemen had overtaken him.

II Samuel 1:7

וַיִּפֹּן	אַחֲרָיו	וַיֵּרָאֵנִי	וַיִּקְרָא	אֵלַי	וַאֲמַר	הִנְנִי
He turned	after him	he saw me	he called	to me	he said	here I am

“He turned around behind himself and saw me, and he called to me and said, ‘Here I am.’

II Samuel 1:8

⁹¹ As noted above, this is the first time Jonathan’s name reappears after he is slain in battle, but reference to his brothers is missing. What is most disturbing is that this messenger thinks he will be rewarded for his report, but David must hear about the death of his dearest friend from a calculating and even giddy messenger. David’s punishment of the messenger and his public mourning may be strategic, but I read this interaction with sadness thinking of how this news was brought to David and how much the tone must have mismatched his emotional state.

⁹² Notice that David is able link the verb “die/מת” to Saul but not to Jonathan. He may be in a state of shock or even denial about the loss of Jonathan.

אָנְכִי	עַמְלֵקִי	אֵלָיו	[וַיֹּאמֶר] (וַיֹּאמֶר)	מִי־אַתָּה	לִי	וַיֹּאמֶר
I	Amalekite	to him	I said	who are you	to me	He said

“And he said to me, ‘Who are you?’ And I said to him, ‘I am an Amalekite.’

II Samuel 1:9

כִּי	וּמַתֵּתִנִּי	עָלַי	עֹמֵד־נָא	אֵלָי	וַיֹּאמֶר
for	and kill me	upon me	stand please	to me	He said
כִּי	נַפְשִׁי	כִּי־כָל־עוֹד	הַשִּׁבְץ	אֲחֻזִּנִּי	
in me	my soul	for all other	the agony	grasp me	

“Then, he said to me, ‘Please, stand over me and kill me, for agony has seized me, for while life is still within me...’⁹³

II Samuel 1:10

יָדַעְתִּי	כִּי	וַאֲמַתֵּתֵהוּ	עָלָיו	וַאֲעֹמֵד
I knew	for	I killed him	upon him	I stood
נָפְלוֹ	אַחֲרָי	יָהִיָּה	לֹא	כִּי
his fall	after	he will be	no	for
וַאֲצַעֲדָהּ	עַל־רֹאשׁוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	הַכֶּזֶר	וַאֲקַח
and armlet	upon his head	which	the crown	I took
הֵנָּה	אֶל־אֲדֹנָי	וַאֲבִיָּאֵם	עַל־זְרֻעוֹ	אֲשֶׁר
they	to my lord	I brought them	upon his arm	which

So, I stood over him and I killed him, for I knew that he could not live after his fall; and I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I brought them here to my lord.”

II Samuel 1:11

וַיִּקְרַעֵם	בְּבִגְדוֹ	דָּוִד	וַיַּחֲזַק
he tore them	in his clothing	David	He strengthened
אֵתוֹ	אֲשֶׁר	כָּל־הָאָנָשִׁים	וְגַם
to him	which	all the people	and also

David took hold of his clothing and he tore them, and all the men who were with him did so, too.

II Samuel 1:12

עַל־שָׂאוֹל	עַד־הָעֶרֶב	וַיָּצְמוּ	וַיִּבְכּוּ	וַיִּסְפְּדוּ
upon Saul	until the evening	they fasted	they cried	They lamented
וְעַל־בֵּית	יְהוָה	וְעַל־עַם	בְּנוֹ	וְעַל־יְהוֹנָתָן
and upon house	YHWH	and upon people	his son	and upon Jonathan

⁹³ Again, I follow Robert Alter with the use of ellipses here. He explains, “This clause, which has vexed some critics and has led to emendations, is most simply construed as a broken-off sentence that the failing Saul does not have the strength to complete” (*The Hebrew Bible*, 308).

יִשְׂרָאֵל	כִּי	נָפְלוּ	בַּחֶרֶב
Israel	for	they fell	in the sword

They lamented and wept, and they fasted until the evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of YHVH and for the house of Israel because they had fallen by the sword.

II Samuel 1:13

וַיֹּאמֶר	דָּוִד	אֶל־הַנֶּעֱר	הַמְגִיד	לּוֹ	אִי	מִזֶּה
He said	David	to the lad	the teller	to him	where	from this
אַתָּה	וַיֹּאמֶר	בֶּן־אִישׁ	גֵּר	עַמְלֵקִי	אֲנִכִּי	
you	he said	son man	sojourner	Amalekite	I	

David said to the reporting lad, “Where are you from?” And he said, “I am the son of an Amalekite sojourner.”

II Samuel 1:14

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	דָּוִד	אֵיךְ	לֹא	יָרֵאתָ
He said	to him	David	how	no	you feared
לִשְׁלֹחַ	יָדְךָ	לְשַׁחֵת	אֶת־מְשִׁיחַ	יְהוָה	
to send	your hand	to destroy	(to) anointed	YHVH	

David said to him, “How were you not afraid to stretch out your hand to destroy the anointed of YHVH?”

II Samuel 1:15

וַיִּקְרָא	דָּוִד	לְאֶחָד	מִהַנְּעָרִים	וַיֹּאמֶר
He called	David	to one	from the lads	he said
גָּשׁ	פָּגַע־בּוֹ	וַיַּכְהוּ	וַיָּמָת	
draw near	strike him	he smote him	he died	

David called to one of the lads and said, “Draw near, strike him!” And he smote him, and he died.

II Samuel 1:16

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֵלָיו	דָּוִד	[דַּמְךָ] (דַּמִּיךְ)	עַל־רֹאשְׁךָ
He said	to him	David	your blood	upon your head
כִּי	פִּיךָ	עָנָה	בְּךָ	לֵאמֹר
for	your mouth	he answered	in you	saying
אֲנִכִּי	מָתַתִּי	אֶת־מְשִׁיחַ	יְהוָה	
I	I killed	(to) anointed	YHVH	

David said to him, “Your blood is upon your head, for your mouth testified against you, saying, ‘I myself killed the anointed of YHVH.’”

II Samuel 1:17

וַיִּקְנֵן	דָּוִד	אֶת־הַקִּינָה	הַזֹּאת	עַל־שָׁאוּל	וְעַל־יְהוֹנָתָן	בְּנוֹ
He chanted a dirge	David	(to) dirge	this	upon Saul	and upon Jonathan	his son

Then, David chanted this dirge over Saul and over Jonathan his son,

II Samuel 1:18

וַיֹּאמֶר	לְלַמֵּד	בְּנֵי־יְהוּדָה	קֶשֶׁת
He said	to teach	sons of Judah	bow
הִנֵּה	כְּתוּבָה	עַל־סֵפֶר	הַיָּשָׁר
behold	written	upon book	the straight

and he said to teach [these] hard things⁹⁴ to the sons of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar:

II Samuel 1:19

הַצִּבִּי	יִשְׂרָאֵל	עַל־בְּמוֹתָיִךְ	חָלַל	אֵיךְ	נָפְלוּ	גִּבּוֹרִים
Beauty	Israel	upon your heights	slain	how	they fell	mighty ones

The roebuck,⁹⁵ O Israel, on your heights lies slain,
How the mighty ones have fallen!

II Samuel 1:20

אַל־תִּגְדֹּ	בַּגָּת	אַל־תִּבְשְׂרוּ	בְּחוּצָת	אַשְׁקֶלֶן	פֶּן־תִּשְׂמַחַנָּה
Do not tell	in Gath	do not bear news	outside	Ashkelon	lest they rejoice
בָּנוֹת	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	פֶּן־תִּעְלָזְנָה	בָּנוֹת	הָעִרְלִים	
daughters	Philistines	lest they exult	daughters	the uncircumcised	

Tell it not in Gath, bear not these tidings in the streets of Ashkelon,
Lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

II Samuel 1:21

הַכִּי	בְּגִלְבֹּעַ	אַל־טַל	וְאַל־מָטָר	עָלֵיכֶם	וּשְׂדֵי
Hills of	in the Gilboa	do not dew	and do not rain	upon you all	and fields of
תְּרוֹמֹת	כִּי	שָׁם	נִגְעַל	מָגֶן	גִּבּוֹרִים
offerings	for	there	cast away	shield	mighty ones
מָגֶן	שָׂאוֹל	בְּלִי	מִשִּׁיחַ	בַּשֶּׁמֶן	
shield	Saul	without	anointed	in the oil	

O hills of Gilboa, let there not be dew, nor rain upon you O lofty fields⁹⁶

⁹⁴ "The Masoretic Text has 'to teach the bow'—a problematic reading because the lament scarcely provides instruction in the arts of war. Some critics delete 'bow' (*qeshet*), following the Septuagint. The present translation revocalizes *qeshet* as *qashot*, with Fokkelman" (*The Hebrew Bible*, 309).

⁹⁵ JPS translates this word as "glory," and Robert Alter writes "splendor," both of which are good options. Still, I wonder if this word could harken back to Jonathan climbing the rocks and slaying the Philistines in I Samuel 14, an act that establishes him as a valiant soldier, comfortable navigating the mountains like a roebuck.

⁹⁶ "The Hebrew *usedeh terumot* is a little obscure. The simplest solution is to treat the initial particle *u* as an excrescence and to read the phrase as a poetic inversion of the similar *meromey sadeh* in Judges 5:18. In the parallelism here, 'lofty fields' would be an epithet for 'hills of Gilboa'" (*The Hebrew Bible*, 301).

For there the shield of the mighty ones was cast away, the shield of Saul without anointing oil.

II Samuel 1:22

מִדָּם	חֲלָלִים	מִחֶלֶב	גִּבּוֹרִים	קֶשֶׁת	יְהוֹנָתָן	לֹא
From blood	slain ones	from fat	mighty ones	bow	Jonathan	no
נָשׁוּג	אָחֹזר	וְחֶרֶב	שָׁאוּל	לֹא	תָשׁוּב	רִיקִם
turned back	back	and sword	Saul	no	will return	empty

From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty ones,
the bow of Jonathan never turned back, and the sword of Saul never returned empty.

II Samuel 1:23

שָׁאוּל	וְיְהוֹנָתָן	הַנְּאֻהִים	וְהַנְּעִימִם	בְּחַיֵּיהֶם	וּבְמוֹתָם
Saul	and Jonathan	the beloveds	and the pleasant ones	in their lives	and in their deaths
לֹא	נִפְרְדּוּ	מִנְּשָׂרִים	קָלוּ	מֵאַרְיֹת	גִּבְרוּ
no	they were parted	from eagles	they were swift	from lions	they prevailed

Saul and Jonathan, beloved and delightful,
In their lives and in their deaths never were they parted;⁹⁷
Swifter than eagles and mightier than lions.

II Samuel 1:24

בָּנוֹת	יִשְׂרָאֵל	אֶל-שָׁאוּל	בְּכִינָה	הַמְלַבְּשָׁכֶם	שָׁנִי
Daughters	Israel	to Saul	they wept	who clothed you	crimson
עַם-עֲדָנִים	הַמַּעֲלָה	עֲדֵי	זָהָב	עַל	לְבוּשָׁךְ
with finery	who ascended	ornaments	gold	upon	your clothing

O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,
who clothed you in crimson finery, who caused your clothing to be ornamented with gold.

II Samuel 1:25

אֵיךְ	נָפְלוּ	גִּבּוֹרִים	בְּתוֹךְ
How	they fell	mighty ones	in middle
הַמִּלְחָמָה	יְהוֹנָתָן	עַל-בְּמוֹתָיִךְ	חָלַל
the war	Jonathan	upon your high places	profane

How the mighty ones have fallen in the midst of the battle;
Jonathan, upon your heights slain!⁹⁸

⁹⁷ Ironically, it is David that parted Jonathan from his father Saul in life. Still, Jonathan joined his father in battle and met his untimely death as a result. There are certainly political motivations behind David's poem that might influence the version of the story he is retelling, but people also tend to see the past with rose-colored glasses when they mourn, and viewing Jonathan as a dutiful son aligns with that impulse.

⁹⁸ Here David pivots and only speaks about Jonathan, and his emotional expressions seem heightened. Whatever mixed feelings he had toward Saul and whatever pressures influence his mourning of them as a pair,

II Samuel 1:26

צָר־לִי	עָלֶיךָ	אֲחִי	יְהוֹנָתָן	נֶעֱמַת	לִי
Distress to me	upon you	my brother	Jonathan	you were pleasant	to me
מְאֹד	נִפְלְאַתָּה	אֲהַבְתָּךְ	לִי	מֵאַהֲבַת	נָשִׁים
much	you were wonderful	your love	to me	from love of	women

I am distressed over you, my brother, Jonathan.

You were most delightful to me, your love was more wonderful to me than the love of women.

II Samuel 1:27

אֵיךְ	נִפְּלוּ	גִבּוֹרִים	וַיִּאֲבְדוּ	כָּלִי	מִלְחָמָה
How	they fell	mighty ones	they perished	vessels	war

How the might ones have fallen,

And perished the weapons of war.

II Samuel 21:12

וַיֵּלֶךְ	דָּוִד	וַיִּקַּח	אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת	שָׁאוֹל
He went	David	he took	(to) bones	Saul
וְאֶת־עֲצָמוֹת	יְהוֹנָתָן	בְּנוֹ	מֵאֵת	בְּעָלָיָם
and (to) bones	Jonathan	his son	from	owners of
יָבִישׁ	גִּלְעָד	אֲשֶׁר	גָּבְבוּ	אֲתָם
Jabesh	Gilead	which	the stole	to them
מִרְחָב	בֵּית־שָׁן	אֲשֶׁר	[תְּלָאוֹם] (תָּלוּם)	[שָׁמָּה פְּלִשְׁתִּים] (שָׁם הַפְּלִשְׁתִּים)
from plaza	Beth-Shan	which	hung	there Philistines
בְּיוֹם	הַכּוֹת	פְּלִשְׁתִּים	אֶת־שָׁאוֹל	בְּגִלְבּוֹעַ
on day	the striking	Philistines	(to) Saul	in Gilboa

David went and he took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the citizens of Jabesh-Gilead, which they had stolen from the square of Beth-Shan, where the Philistines had hung them on the day the Philistines struck down Saul at Gilboa.

II Samuel 21:13

וַיַּעַל	מִשָּׁם	אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת	שָׁאוֹל	וְאֶת־עֲצָמוֹת
He brought up	from there	(to) bones	Saul	and (to) bones
יְהוֹנָתָן	בְּנוֹ	וַיִּאֲסְפוּ	אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת	הַמוֹקְעִים
Jonathan	his son	they gathered	(to) bones	the dislocated

He brought up from there the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son, and they gathered the bones of the impaled.

his expressions of grief over Jonathan alone read as significant and genuine (though of course it is presumptuous to claim to read into the mind of any biblical figure).

II Samuel 21:14

וַיִּקְבְּרוּ	אֶת־עֲצָמוֹת־שָׁאוּל	וַיהוֹנָתָן־בְּנוֹ	בְּאֶרֶץ	בְּנֵימִן	בְּצֵלָע
They buried	(to) bones Saul	and Jonathan his son	in land	Benjamin	in Zela
בְּקִבְרֵי	קִישׁ	אָבִיו	וַיַּעֲשׂוּ	כָּל	אֲשֶׁר־צִוָּה
in grave	Kish	his father	they did	all	which he commanded
הַמֶּלֶךְ	וַיַּעֲתֵר	אֱלֹהִים	לָאָרֶץ	אַחֲרֵי־כֵן	
the king	he entreated	God	to the land	after yes	

Then, they buried the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son in the land of Benjamin, in Zela, in the grave of Kish his father, and they did all that the king commanded; and God responded to the plea for the land thereafter.

CONCLUSION

An unalterable fact about the human condition is that we will all die someday. This is a true statement, but also an unpleasant and disconcerting one. So much of modern life discourages us from contemplating mortality because there is always something new to read or watch or listen to, content that keeps us engaged at the surface level only. But as calming as these distractions may be in the short term, they are ultimately unsatisfying, because our existential concerns remain in the background, and we must address them to lead a life of meaning and intention. The sense that there must be a deeper and more thoughtful way to approach life brings many people into religious spaces. While some synagogue events can just be social, some prayer services familiar, and some Torah study focused on untangling the plotline of a confusing story, there is so much more Jewish tradition has to offer. The Tanach speaks across generations not simply because it ought to be revered and respected, but because it focuses on fundamental human questions. This sacred text shows that we need not navigate our paths alone, rather we can do so as a community informed by the successes and missteps of our ancestors. By including deathbed scenes that range from dignified to despondent, the Tanach both allows us to draw replicable lessons from more ideal circumstances and offers relatable examples when we fall short.

In the stories of Jacob, Aaron, and David, we see examples of “good” deaths, as all three men met the end of life with intention and authority. These leaders experience reassurance as they command the respect of their families and followers, even as they age and prepare to pass away. We as readers are also reassured by seeing that growing old does not necessarily mean a person diminishes in stature or power, as our anti-aging culture would have us believe today. Jacob, Aaron, and David were all able to pass on their legacies and leadership roles to their chosen successors and know that their values were understood and respected by others. Contemporary readers are unlikely to experience the highly dramatic and choreographed endings these men had, and that may

be for the best. Saving final wishes until the last minute is a great plot device, but it is not the preferred way to communicate one's wishes. Instead, we can take inspiration from these stories and find modern ways to help every person approach death with intention and authority. This may take the form of legal paperwork assigning a healthcare proxy, signing a DNR order, and writing a will to distribute one's resources. It may also occur in less formal but deeply meaningful ways like crafting an ethical will designed to pass on one's most cherished memories, values, and advice. The earlier that a person accepts and addresses mortality, the more likely they are to make decisions and have discussions that allow them to maintain control and dignity at the end of life. This work is hard, but it is a tremendous gift to both the person who is dying and their loved ones.

With Isaac, Moses, and Joshua, readers see great leaders grapple with the very real and hard limitations death imposes. These men were no strangers to experiencing limitations earlier in life, whether in the Akeidah, leading the recalcitrant Israelites through the wilderness, or failing to capture all of the Promised Land. Such shortcomings help prepare them to accept the reality that so much lays beyond our control as we reach the end of life and try to pass on a legacy to the next generation. We may age like Isaac and find that physical decline leaves us vulnerable to manipulation by others. Even more likely, we will feel the anxiety of Moses and Joshua that the guidance we give to others will not be consistently followed. The truth is that even the people who love and respect us most have their own preferences and needs, and they may find themselves in situations where listening to our advice does not make sense or feel right. Often the best we can do is to lead by example throughout our lives, both showing and naming the values we hold dear, and inspiring others to invest in those as well. Once we recognize that which lies outside of our control, we can focus on the things we can influence and come to a greater sense of acceptance and peace.

Rachel, Er, and Jonathan all die at an inopportune time of life, when they are expected to be at the height of their abilities, building up households. Their deaths are especially tragic not only

because they are unexpected, but also because there is so much lost potential. The same is true for people who die at an early age today, leaving their loved ones to wonder what life would have been like had they survived to reach different milestones such as graduating from school, becoming a parent, or seeing their grandchildren grow. As upsetting as these stories are to read, it may also bring a sense of comfort to those mourning a tragic loss that their pain is not too difficult or remote to be included in our sacred text. The flawed reactions of Jacob, Judah, and David in these stories also serve to acknowledge that grieving is a hard and imperfect process. These men had power, privilege, and a significant connection to the Divine, and they still made mistakes as they tried to commemorate and honor their loved ones. Despite these issues, we still remember Rachel, Er, and Jonathan, and the people they left behind found ways to grow, repair relationships, and access the best parts of themselves at some point in the mourning process. These stories demonstrate that perfection is an impossible standard for mourners, but a thoughtful, empathic, and deeply human approach to grief is a wonderful goal set out in Jewish tradition.

For those who have read this thesis in an effort to find new ways to think about their own deaths and legacies, I hope that the stories of our ancestors serve as a basis for reflection and discussion. For others who approach this work in a state of mourning, I hope the texts provide comfort and cause you to feel affirmed in the highs and lows of that ongoing process. Most of all, it is my sincere wish that Jewish spaces welcome big, existential questions and the people who ask them. Everyone deserves a life of meaning, and communities based in shared traditions that help us to achieve this essential and profound goal.

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