

God Meant it for Good

Text: Genesis 50:1-26

Introduction:

1. In this final chapter of Genesis, the deaths and burials of two great heroes of the faith is recorded – Jacob and Joseph. It also contains Joseph’s final recorded words. Words of forgiveness to his brothers and words of faith for Israel’s future.
2. This last chapter of Genesis covers the last half of Joseph’s life. It covers 54 of the 110 years Joseph lived.
3. This chapter contains arguably the most powerful statement by Joseph recorded in the Bible, Genesis 50:20, which has been rightly called the Romans 8:28 verse of the Old Testament.
4. We will study this final record of Joseph’s life under three headings.

I. THE FUNERAL FOR JOSEPH’S FATHER (49:29-50:13)

This section records Jacob’s final words, death and burial.

A. The Planning for Jacob’s Burial (49:29-33)

1. The Faith Behind It (Vs. 29-30)
 - a. Jacob believed in life after death – “I am to be gathered unto my people” (See also Vs. 33).
 - b. Jacob believed in the promises of God. For Jacob, the promises of God were inseparably connected to the land of Canaan. His request to be buried there was an act of faith.
2. The Feelings Behind It (Vs. 31-32). The cave of Machpelah also held sentimental value for Jacob. Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were all buried there.
3. The Final Breath After It (Vs. 33)

Two simple facts about death can be noted here:

 - a. Death takes place when the spirit leaves the body – “and yielded up the ghost”.
 - b. Death is the doorway into the next life – “and was gathered unto his people”. For Jacob as an Old Testament saint, he would have gone to the Paradise section of Hades (Abraham’s bosom), a place of comfort and fellowship with the other departed believers.
 - c. Challenge: When you step through death’s door, where will you go? Will you step through the door of death into the everlasting flames of hell or the everlasting glories of heaven?

B. The Preparation for Jacob’s Burial (Vs. 1-3)

1. Mourning the Dead (Vs. 1, 3b)

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- a. The pain of the mourning (Vs. 1). As Jacob breathes his last, Joseph dramatically collapses on his father's lifeless body in a flood of tears and gives the lifeless face one final kiss goodbye. Weeping is an appropriate response to the death of a loved one. As believers we "sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (1 Thess. 4:13) when a saved loved one leaves this life but we do experience sorrow nonetheless. Tears are God's gift to us in times of suffering. Research has found that crying releases oxytocin and endorphins. These feel-good chemicals can help ease both physical and emotional pain. Ecc. 7:3 reads, "Sorrow is better than laughter: for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better."
 - b. The period of the mourning (Vs. 3b). According to ancient historians, 72 days mourning were observed for an Egyptian Pharaoh so Jacob is given an honour almost equal to that of a king with the 70-day period of mourning.
 - c. Note: It is interesting to observe that Joseph had his first 17 years with Jacob and Jacob had his final 17 years with Joseph.
2. Mummifying the Dead (Vs. 2-3a)
 - a. The Egyptians were experts at embalming the dead to preserve the body for generations to come. So successful were they, says the Smithsonian Institute, that we can view the mummified body of an Egyptian and have a good idea of what he or she looked like in life, 3,000 years ago.¹
 - b. For the Egyptians, they went through this process believing that in time the spirit would return to the body. Joseph would not have believed in the Egyptian pagan ideas about burial but the body of his father would need to be preserved in order for it to be transported back to Canaan and buried. Burial is a Christian practice as we believe in the future resurrection of the body. In the Bible, believers were never cremated, always buried.
- C. The Procession of Jacob's Burial (Vs. 4-11)**
1. The Request to Pharaoh (Vs. 4-6)
 - a. Joseph makes a formal request to the house of Pharaoh to obtain permission to fulfill the promise made to his father before he died to bury him in the land of Canaan. Joseph includes a promise that he would return. Pharaoh grants the request.
 - b. It is interesting to note that Joseph does not apply directly to Pharaoh but through his representatives. It was probably because in Egyptian culture Joseph would have been viewed as ceremonially unclean on account of mourning the dead.
 2. The Retinue from Pharaoh (Vs. 7-11)

¹ <https://www.si.edu/spotlight/ancient-egypt/mummies> Viewed 27/10/23

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- a. The specialness of it (Vs. 7-9a). What a royal procession this was! Look at the dignitaries involved:
 - i. All Pharaoh's servants (Vs. 7a)
 - ii. The elders of Pharaoh's house (Vs. 7b)
 - iii. The elders of Egypt (Vs. 7c)
 - iv. The children of Israel (Vs. 8). Only their little ones, flocks and herd remained in Goshen.
 - v. Military personnel (chariots and horsemen) (Vs. 9a)
- b. The size of it (Vs. 9b). The Bible states that it was "a very great company".
- c. The sadness of it (Vs. 10-11)
 - i. The caravan pauses at "the threshing floor of Atad" east of Jordan and carries out a formal 7-day period of mourning.
 - ii. The mourning so impacted the local Canaanites that they named the place 'Abelmizraim' meaning "meadow of Egypt".

D. The Place of Jacob's Burial (Vs. 12-13)

1. Joseph and his brothers fulfill their promise and bury Jacob in the cave of the field of Machpelah.
2. It is again noted that this parcel of ground had been purchased by Abraham for a burying place from Ephron the Hittite.

II. THE FORGIVENESS OF JOSEPH'S FAMILY (Vs. 14-21)

The pain of Jacob's passing was over but now Joseph was to be confronted with the pain of his brothers doubting the sincerity of his forgiveness. Take note of:

A. Their Assumption about Joseph (Vs. 14-15)

1. The Context of their Doubts (Vs. 14) The funeral was over and life began to return to normal but the pain of their father's passing had reawakened guilt from the past and fears that Joseph would treat them differently now that Jacob was dead.
2. The Conversation about their Doubts (Vs. 15)
 - a. They assumed Joseph would hate them – "Joseph will peradventure hate us". Joseph had shown them nothing but love but they doubted the sincerity of his love.
 - b. They assumed Joseph would take revenge on them – "and will certainly requite us".
3. The Cause of their Doubts
 - a. They were struggling with a lingering sense of guilt over what they had done to Joseph in the past. They struggled to believe that Joseph had really forgiven them. In reality, Joseph had freely and fully forgiven them! Sometimes believers struggle with

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doubts about God's forgiveness of their sins. Remember! Forgiveness is granted on the basis of God's grace, not our own goodness (Eph. 2:8-9). If we were good, we would not need forgiveness!

- b. They were inclined to ascribe to Joseph thought patterns and motives that were in representative of their own natural inclinations. We have a tendency to suspect others will act as we would be inclined to act in a given situation. Their words of doubt said more about them and their character than it did about Joseph. Griffith Thomas writes, "They (the brothers) measured Joseph by themselves, and thought that he was harbouring resentment and only biding his time. What a revelation of their own nature they thus gave! In our suspicions of other people, we often reveal ourselves."

B. Their Appeal to Joseph (Vs. 16-18)

1. Their Proxy Appeal Vs. 16-17).
 - a. This highlights just how much they had believed their own false thinking. They didn't feel they could approach Joseph personally to begin with.
 - b. They send a message they claimed was from their father Jacob appealing to Joseph to forgive them for their wrongdoing. They didn't need to ask forgiveness for what had already been forgiven!
 - c. Joseph wept when he received the message. He was clearly broken hearted that they thought this way. They had totally misjudged him. His forgiveness of his brothers had been totally sincere and honourable.
2. Their Personal Appeal (Vs. 18). They come before Joseph, fall down before him and offer to be his slaves.

C. Their Assurance from Joseph (Vs. 19-21)

Joseph's reply is full of instruction and says so much about the maturity and depth of Joseph's faith in God.

1. Joseph's God-centred Response (Vs. 19-20)

As we have seen consistently with Joseph's life and testimony to date, his response to this situation God-centred.

 - a. He understood God's Place in his Trial (Vs. 19)
 - i. Joseph had the right view of himself and the right view of God. Even though he had been elevated to such a high position within Egypt, he was humble. He knew God's throne was far above his. He believed in the sovereignty of God in his trial. He didn't try and take God's role in the situation.

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- ii. Romans 12:19 “Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.”
- b. He understood God’s Purpose in his Trial (Vs. 20)
 - i. Joseph saw God’s hand in His trial. By faith he was able to discern God’s grand design and purpose in it all.
 - ii. Interestingly, the word ‘thought’ and ‘meant’ come from the same Hebrew word (‘chashab’) which literally means to plait (weave, braid), fabricate and therefore has the sense to plan, plot, devise.
 - iii. Do you see the picture? The brothers planned evil for Joseph but God planned good. God’s good plans overruled man’s evil plans. While Joseph’s brothers wicked hands were weaving a web of pain for Joseph, God’s invisible fingers were taking the evil threads of Joseph’s trial and weaving them together for good into a tapestry of His grace that would glorify Him. Psalm 18:30-32 “As for God, **his way is perfect**: the word of the LORD is tried: he *is* a buckler to all those that trust in him. For who *is* God save the LORD? or who *is* a rock save our God? *It is* God that girdeth me with strength, and **maketh my way perfect.**”
 - iv. Joseph discerned that God’s purposes went way beyond just himself as an individual. God was working things together for good for Joseph but it was a much bigger plan than that. God was working to save many people alive, most importantly, the fledgling nation of Israel.
 - v. Genesis 50:20 has been rightly called the Romans 8:28 verse of the Old Testament.
- 2. Joseph’s Grace-filled Response (Vs. 19a, 21)

Joseph could have responded with anger and resentment to this hurtful doubting of his forgiveness but instead he responds with grace and love. Joseph comforted them with:

 - a. Words of Peace – “fear not” (Vs. 19a, 21a). Joseph’s words of assurance asswaged their fears. When we are tempted to doubt God’s forgiveness, He speaks words of peace to our souls and says “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” (Jer. 31:3) **“Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”** (John 14:27)
 - b. Words of Promise – “I will nourish you and your little ones”. Joseph promises – to preserve them. Praise God that our God not only saves us but he preserves and keeps us.

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- i. 1 Peter 1:5 “**Who are kept by the power of God** through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.”
- ii. Jude 1:1 “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and **preserved** in Jesus Christ, *and* called:”
- iii. John 10:27-28 “**My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand.**”

III. THE FAITH OF JOSEPH FOR THE FUTURE (VS. 22-26)

These verses record a summation of Joseph’s life in Egypt, his final words and his death. They reveal more of Joseph’s steadfast and abiding faith in God. Joseph’s faith is demonstrated in:

A. His Conduct in Egypt (Vs. 22-23)

We could call this the reward of faith. Much of the first half of Joseph’s life had been filled with trials and troubles. Now he enjoys the blessings of faithfulness for the remainder of his life. He enjoyed the blessings of:

1. The Blessing of Peace – he dwelt in peace with his father’s house in Egypt.
2. The Blessing of Posterity – he enjoyed the blessings of seeing his grandchildren and great grandchildren. Family blessings are amongst God’s richest and most precious gifts to us as His children.
3. The Blessing of a Prolonged Life - Joseph was 56 years old when Jacob died (Gen. 41:46, 53; 45:6; 47:28). Joseph continued to live for another fifty-four years after that, finally dying at the age of 110.

B. His Confidence in God’s Promises (Vs. 24)

1. The foundation of his faith. Joseph’s faith for the future was founded on God’s promise to Abraham. Gen. 15:13 “And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years;”
2. The certainty of his faith. Joseph’s faith in God’s promises was certain. Twice Joseph sates, “God will surely visit you” (Vs. 24, 25).
3. The action of his faith. Because Joseph believed God, he commanded the children of Israel that they were to take his bones with them when they departed from Egypt and bury them in the promised land. This was fulfilled by their heirs (Ex. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).
4. “Joseph’s body was embalmed and put in a coffin (or wooden mummy case). In that way, it could be seen by his descendants and those of his brothers, serving as a perpetual reminder of God’s

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- promise to them – and therefore also as a reminder of God's purpose – that they would all someday return to Canaan." (Morris)
5. Out of all the acts of faith from Joseph's life, it was this act of faith that was highlighted by the writer to the Hebrews. Heb. 11:22 "**By faith Joseph**, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones."
 6. From Joseph's example we see that faith is hearing God's Word, believing it, and acting upon it (Rom. 10:17).
 7. Notice how Genesis starts and ends. It begins with the Eternal Creator God (Gen. 1:1) and ends with a coffin in Egypt (Gen. 50:26). What a reminder of the infiniteness of God and the finiteness of man! What a reminder that while the best of men pass off the scene from this earth, God remains forever and His work goes on. John Wesley said, "God buries His workman, but His work goes on." G. Campbell Morgan wisely observed: "Commit your life to God, see vision, do the work that's nearest, the work He appoints, truly and well and faithfully, and die knowing that you have started delicate influences, dynamic forces which will proceed through every succeeding generation until they gather up the harvest of glorious results about the throne of the Eternal. The man of God has not finished his work in the world when they put him in a coffin."

Conclusion:

1. Are you ready to die? Where are you going to spend eternity? Have you trusted Christ as Saviour?
2. By God's grace, Joseph finished his life well! Will you?
3. How are you responding in your trials? Are you growing better by God's grace or bitter?