



## Genesis - Chapter Fifty

### II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues/concludes)

#### II.c Genesis 37:1-50:26 - Jacob's Descendants (continues/concludes)

#### II.c.xvii Genesis 49:29-50:14 - Jacob's Death and Burial (continues/concludes)

#### Summary of Chapter Fifty

Following a period of mourning for his father Jacob, Joseph receives permission to have his body laid to rest in Canaan. The funeral party was impressive and contained many Egyptian dignitaries as well Jacob's family. It was, in essence, a state funeral for the last of the patriarchs. He was buried with Abraham and Isaac in the cave at Machpelah.

Following the death of Jacob, his brothers feared that he would seek retribution against them for selling him into slavery but Joseph notes that, although their intent was for evil, they were fulfilling God's destiny for Joseph.

At the age of 110 years and being a great grandfather, Joseph too dies. He is not buried in Canaan as were his predecessors but it was his request that his remains be taken into the Promised Land at the time God called the Hebrew nation out of Egypt.

<sup>1</sup> Then Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him. <sup>2</sup> Joseph commanded the physicians in his service to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel; <sup>3</sup> they spent forty days in doing this, for that is the time required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him for seventy days.

### Genesis 50:1-3

Joseph threw himself on his father's face and wept over him and kissed him.

The passing of Jacob in the presence of his sons was a deeply moving and dramatic scene, with Joseph lying across the corpse.

Joseph arranges for Jacob's body to be embalmed. This was necessary in order to delay the normal process of putrefaction and so enable Jacob's corpse to be transported to Hebron. Mummification was not practiced by the Hebrews, and so Joseph entrusts the task to Egyptian physicians. Since embalming was normally a religious practice involving priests, Joseph may have deliberately chosen to use physicians in order to distinguish his father's beliefs from those of the Egyptian priests. Apart from Jacob, the only other person in the Bible who was embalmed is Joseph (v.26).

**Although the bodies of Hebrews and Jews were not embalmed they were often dressed in spices and wrapped in grave cloths to mask the odour of purification as the body decomposed. This is confirmed in the case of Jesus: <<By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial>> (Matthew 26:12), and: <<Nicodemus, who had at first come to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, weighing about a hundred pounds. They took the body of Jesus and wrapped it with the spices in linen cloths, according to the burial custom of the Jews>> (John 19:39-40).**

The seventy days of mourning reflects Egyptian royal practice according to some ancient sources, e.g. Herodotus, History 2.86, but 72 days in Diodorus of Sicily, Histories 1.72, suggesting that Jacob is being shown very high honour; for the Israelites the period of mourning was normally between seven and thirty days, whilst in Egypt the 72 days of mourning were normally for royal deaths such as for Pharaoh or his queen. It is unclear, however, whether the two periods mentioned are consecutive or concurrent.

<sup>4</sup> When the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph addressed the household of Pharaoh, 'If now I have found favour with you, please speak to Pharaoh as follows: <sup>5</sup> My father made me swear an oath; he said, "I am about to die. In the tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore let me go up, so that I may bury my father; then I will return.' <sup>6</sup> Pharaoh answered, 'Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear to do.'

### Genesis 50:4-6

Joseph addressed the household of Pharaoh. Joseph seeks permission from Pharaoh to bury his father in the land of Canaan.

Now therefore let me go up, so that I may bury my father. Since most of Canaan was on a higher elevation above sea level than Egypt, then people travelled up to it. For example: <<*I declare that I will bring you up out of the misery of Egypt, to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey*>> (Exodus 3:17).

<sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, <sup>8</sup> as well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. <sup>9</sup> Both chariots and charioteers went up with him. It was a very great company.

#### Genesis 50:7-9

So Joseph went up to bury his father. Probably as a result of the high esteem in which Joseph was held, the funeral procession comprises a large number of prominent Egyptian officials and public figures. This was more like a state funeral than a normal interment.

<sup>10</sup> When they came to the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they held there a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed a time of mourning for his father for seven days. <sup>11</sup> When the Canaanite inhabitants of the land saw the mourning on the threshing-floor of Atad, they said, 'This is a grievous mourning on the part of the Egyptians.' Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan.

#### Genesis 50:10-11

Coming to the threshing-floor of Atad, the funeral procession halts to mourn for a further seven days: <<*Then they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh, and fasted for seven days*>> (1 Samuel 31:13), <<*They sat with him on the ground for seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great*>> (Job 2:13), and: <<*I came to the exiles at Tel-abib, who lived by the river Chebar. And I sat there among them, stunned, for seven days*>> (Ezekiel 3:15). The precise location is not known. The expression beyond the Jordan is sufficiently ambiguous to place Atad in either Canaan or Transjordan.

Threshing-floors were normally on an elevated place so that the wind could be used to separate the chaff from the grain. The week of mourning made such an impact on the local population that they named the place Abel-mizraim, which means 'the mourning of Egypt'.

<sup>12</sup> Thus his sons did for him as he had instructed them. <sup>13</sup> They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, the field near Mamre, which Abraham bought as a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. <sup>14</sup> After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

#### Genesis 50:12-14

These verses confirm that Jacob's request in 49:29-32 was carried out. Abraham's purchase of the cave at Machpelah is recorded in Chapter 23.

#### II.c.xviii Genesis 50:15-21 - Joseph Forgives His Brothers

Following the burial of Jacob, the brothers are fearful that Joseph will take revenge on them for all the evil that they did by selling him into slavery.

<sup>15</sup> Realising that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, 'What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?' <sup>16</sup> So they approached Joseph, saying, 'Your father gave this instruction before he died, <sup>17</sup> "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you." Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father.' Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

#### Genesis 50:15-17

So they approached Joseph. Afraid to address Joseph face-to-face, the brothers actually send a **message**, confessing their guilt and seeking his forgiveness, which would be in keeping with the will of God: <<***For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you***>> (Matthew 6:14).

Your father gave this instruction before he died. There is no indication in Scripture that Jacob was ever informed of the Joseph's treatment at the hand of his brothers. It seems likely they may have even made up the instruction to try to persuade Joseph not to seek retribution against them. However, they needed to have no fear of their younger brother for, when he heard their plea for forgiveness Joseph wept when they spoke to him. This may have been as much in the sadness that they did not feel reconciled to him as it was at their repentance. However, his attitude was more righteous than theirs: <<***On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain***>> (Zephaniah 3:11), and: <<***Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a***>>

*blessing. It is for this that you were called – that you might inherit a blessing>> (1 Peter 3:9).*

<sup>18</sup> Then his brothers also wept, fell down before him, and said, ‘We are here as your slaves.’ <sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, ‘Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? <sup>20</sup> Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. <sup>21</sup> So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones.’ In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

### Genesis 50:18-21

Probably encouraged by news of Joseph’s reaction to their message, the brothers also wept and fell down before him. Once again, their obeisance and words: We are here as your slaves, fulfil Joseph’s dreams (37:5-10). Echoing what he had said previously (45:5-9), Joseph stresses that God transformed their evil into good and that as a result, many people have been preserved.

Am I in the place of God? Joseph first understood he was not in the place of God. It was not his job to bring retribution upon his brothers. If the Lord chose to punish them, he would have to find an instrument other than Joseph. From a human perspective, Joseph had the right and the ability to bring retribution upon his brothers, but he knew God was God and he was not. Such retribution was God’s place, not Joseph’s: <<*For we know the one who said, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people’>> (Hebrews 10:30).*

This principle that God ultimately overrules human sin for his glory and the ultimate good of mankind is important in Scripture. The crucifixion is the prime example of it, refer to Acts 3:13-26 and Romans 8:28. Joseph’s gracious, forgiving attitude unites the family. Like the lives of Jacob and Esau, Joseph’s life was marred by deadly hatred between brothers. In both cases the story ends with the offended brother’s offering full forgiveness to those who had mistreated him, refer to 33:4.

So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones. Joseph’s love for his brothers was shown not only in feelings and words, but also in practical action. He actually did provide for his brothers and their families.

In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them. Because Joseph trusted the overarching hand of God, even in all the evil that came upon him through his brothers, he showed the love and compassion to them he did: <<*and be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you>> (Ephesians 4:32).*

## II.c.xix Joseph's 50:22-26 - Last Days and Death

The final 60 years of Joseph's life in Egypt are passed over in almost complete silence. Apart from briefly mentioning the birth of some children, this final section of Genesis focuses on the death of Joseph. As it brings the account of his earthly life to a conclusion, it looks to the future, anticipating the time when God will bring the Israelites out of Egypt and return them to the land of Canaan.

<sup>22</sup> So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived for one hundred and ten years. <sup>23</sup> Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees.

### Genesis 50:22-23

Joseph lives long enough to see the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of Ephraim; the precise sense of third generation is disputed.

<sup>24</sup> Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.' <sup>25</sup> So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, 'When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here.' <sup>26</sup> And Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

### Genesis 50:24-26

With death imminent, Joseph makes arrangements for his bones to be taken to Canaan. Unlike his father Jacob (49:29-32), Joseph does not focus on the burial site at Machpelah. Rather, he confidently affirms that God will lead the Israelites out of Egypt to Canaan. When this happens, Joseph wants his bones to be transported there. Later, Moses fulfils this instruction: <<*And Moses took with him the bones of Joseph, who had required a solemn oath of the Israelites, saying, 'God will surely take notice of you, and then you must carry my bones with you from here'*>> (Exodus 13:19), and Joseph's remains are eventually buried at Shechem: <<*The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem, in the portion of ground that Jacob had bought from the children of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for one hundred pieces of money; it became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph*>> (Joshua 24:32).

He was embalmed. Joseph and his father are the only two men who are specifically embalmed in the bible. Refer to the comment on Jacob's embalmment in vv.1-3. Now the first audience of Genesis has the relevant parts of the

background to the book of Exodus, which relates events much closer to their own time and indeed part of their own experience.

Joseph was placed in a coffin in Egypt. According to this passage and: <<***By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave instructions about his burial***>> (Hebrews 11:22), Joseph was never buried. His coffin laid above ground for the 400 or so years until it was taken back to Canaan. It was a silent witness for all those years that Israel was going back to the Promised Land, just as God had promised.

Traditionally, throughout that time, when a child of Israel saw Joseph's coffin and asked what it was there for and why it was not buried, they could be answered, "Because the great man Joseph did not want to be buried in Egypt, but in the Promised Land God will one day lead us to."