

The Belonging: A Study in Genesis 37-50
Lesson 10 - Joseph's Last Words
Genesis 50

God's sovereign purposes will be accomplished.

After completing the task of pronouncing a blessing over each son, Jacob “drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people” (Genesis 49:33). The long and fruitful life of the patriarch, Jacob, has come to an end. Psalm 116:15 says, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones.”

I. Joseph's Pain (Genesis 50:1-14)

For seventeen years, Jacob has enjoyed the blessing of being with his reunited family. Watching his family grow and prosper in Egypt has given the aging patriarch no small measure of joy. I believe joy had been in short supply for Jacob during the almost two decades of separation from Joseph, believing his son to be dead. But God! Through a series of divine appointments, God had restored Jacob's family and relocated them in Egypt because of the terrible famine.

Jacob, as Joseph's father, is highly regarded by Pharaoh and his constituents. Consequently, he is treated with the kind of honor and respect normally reserved for members of the royal family. While Jacob has intentionally avoided learning the ways of Egypt and dogmatically holding onto the manner of life common to the children of Israel, he is grateful for the provisions made for his family in Egypt. But his heart remains in Canaan, the covenant land of God's people. Jacob, knowing his death is imminent, has asked Joseph to carry him out of Egypt and bury him in Canaan (Genesis 47:29-31). Joseph swears to Jacob that he will honor his wishes. As Jacob breathes his last, “Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him” (Genesis 50:1).

A.P. Ross summarizes what followed,

Joseph instructed that Jacob's body be embalmed for burial in typical Egyptian fashion. The embalming period was seldom less than a month and normally took 40 days. The Egyptians mourned for Jacob 70 days—two and one-half months—just two days short of the normal time of mourning for a Pharaoh. This showed the great respect the Egyptians had for Joseph. (A.P. Ross, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, p. 99–100)

As the father of Egypt's Prime Minister, Jacob receives a state funeral similar to the kind reserved for pharaohs. Jacob is well known and highly regarded because of Joseph. Their response to the death of his father indicates how much Joseph is loved and respected by the Egyptian people.

Although Joseph is second only to Pharaoh, he approaches “the household of Pharaoh” to gain an audience with the ruler (Genesis 50:4). He intends to ask for permission to travel to Canaan to bury his father. Pharaoh says, “Go up and bury your father as he made you swear” (Genesis 50:6).

John Phillips explains the reason for Joseph's seeking permission,

Joseph was a born diplomat. He knew he was indispensable to Pharaoh even though the years of famine were long a thing of the past. If he and all his kin were to have left for Canaan it would have alarmed the Egyptians and prompted restrictive measures. He needed permission to leave. Should he approach Pharaoh himself? Joseph knew enough about the whims of autocrats not to risk that. He therefore urged his friends to make the first approach for him along with his promise to return. That was enough for Pharaoh. There was not a soul in Egypt, highborn or low, who did not know the value of Joseph's word; it was worth millions. What a testimony Joseph had (John Phillips, *Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 374).

Genesis 50:7-9 records,

So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company.

This is Joseph's first time back in his homeland in 39 years. Bittersweet memories must flood his mind as he makes the trek back to Canaan. Does his mind drift back to his trip from his father's house to Egypt in a Midianite caravan after being sold as a slave by his own brothers? Do his brothers have flashbacks of their despicable behavior? Does fresh shame wash over them considering how Joseph had suffered at their hands? The Scripture is silent on the topic, but memories (both good and bad) tend to lodge deep in the soul and are not easily shaken loose. Thankfully we do know that Joseph has chosen to overlay all the harrowing things he has experienced with the sovereignty of God, believing His is able to work all things together for good. Joseph and his brothers "carried [Jacob] to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite" (Genesis 50:13).

II. Joseph's Pardon (Genesis 50:15-21)

"When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead" (Genesis 50:15a), they were afraid of their brother's reaction. "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" (Genesis 50:15b). With the death of their father, the brothers fear Joseph will want to settle the score and seek retribution against them. They wonder if his declaration of forgiveness was just for their father's benefit and Joseph has been biding his time until Jacob died. Joseph certainly has good reason to seek revenge and, with his position in Pharaoh's house, he has means and opportunity. After all, who will challenge Joseph if he makes the decision to imprison his brothers or even worse?

One of the brothers goes to Joseph to speak on their behalf saying,

Your father charged before he died, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father (Genesis 50:16-17).

Upon hearing these words, Joseph weeps. How could they not know his heart after all the ways he has sought to bless them the past 17 years? How tragic that instead of believing Joseph and receiving his forgiveness, they have allowed their crime against their brother to gnaw at them.

Years earlier, two sons had been born to Joseph and his Egyptian wife, Potiphea. “Joseph names the firstborn Manasseh, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.’ He named the second Ephraim, ‘For,’ he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction’” (Genesis 41:51-52). Joseph settled the issue of forgiveness years before he was reunited with his brothers. The names of his sons validate that. Joseph has done the work to avoid allowing animosity to take root in his heart. He has sought the Lord and allowed Him to purge him of any latent bitterness.

When Joseph was initially reunited with his brothers he said, “Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Genesis 45:5). At that point, Joseph had already forgiven his brothers. As they met Joseph’s boys or heard their names, it should have served as a reminder of Joseph’s love gift of forgiveness made possible by his walk with God. Instead, the brothers lived in fear of Joseph’s retribution for over 37 years!

In Genesis 50:18, the brothers fall down in front of Joseph and say, “Behold, we are your servants.” Joseph responds with words of tender mercy, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? **As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good** in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive” (Genesis 50:19-20, emphasis mine). Don’t you love that? Joseph recognizes the sovereignty of God at work in his situation and has learned to walk in it!

Chuck Swindoll writes,

Joseph was led by grace. He spoke by grace. He forgave by grace. He forgot by grace. He loved by grace. He remembered by grace. Because of grace, when his brothers bowed before him in fear, he could say, “Get on your feet! God meant it all for good” (Chuck Swindoll, *Joseph: A Man of Integrity and Forgiveness*, p. 204).

Joseph alleviates their fears and comforts them. Such is grace. Such is Joseph. Such is Jesus our Lord, who extends grace upon grace. The brothers are united in grace!

III. Joseph’s Parting (Genesis 50:22-26)

We are coming to the end of the book of Genesis. This book begins with a garden and ends with a grave. Joseph lives to be 110 years old. As he approaches death, he makes the sons of Israel swear that they will take his bones with them when they exit Egypt. By faith, Joseph believes God’s word to Abram. In Genesis 15:13-16 God tells Abram,

Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.

The promise was made 300 years before Joseph was born and while it would be centuries before it would be fulfilled according to God's timetable, Joseph believes by faith that it will be accomplished. Joseph must know that their arrival in Egypt has started the countdown on the prophetic clock on their sojourn there.

Out of all Joseph's accomplishments, the Spirit of God highlights his final request as his greatest act of faith. Hebrews 11:22 makes reference to this event, "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones." Egypt was never meant to be the final dwelling place for the Israelites. It will, however, be their homeland for 400 years. For a period of time, it will be a great blessing for them. However, this place of blessing will become a place of affliction for the Hebrews.

As long as Joseph is in power, the Israelites are protected. However, the time then comes when Joseph dies, "and all his brothers and all that generation. But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased greatly, and multiplied, and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them" (Exodus 1:6-7). The Hebrew population will flourish until a new king will arise over Egypt, "who did not know Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). The new king of Egypt will feel threatened by the number of Hebrews in his land. He will enslave them and make "their lives bitter with hard labor" (Exodus 1:14). He will also demand that the Hebrew midwives kill all the newborn baby boys.

Did the Israelites honor Joseph's wishes when they left Egypt? Indeed, they did. Exodus 13:19 says, "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him, for he had made the sons of Israel solemnly swear, saying, 'God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones from here with you.'" Throughout all the years of the wilderness wandering, the bones of Joseph will be carried along until the Israelites enter the Promised Land. There Joseph will be laid to rest. Joshua 24:32 says, "Now they buried the bones of Joseph, which the sons of Israel brought up from Egypt, at Shechem, in the piece of ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of money; and they became the inheritance of Joseph's sons."

We have learned so many valuable lessons from the life of Joseph. Themes such as forgiveness, patience, endurance, trusting God, integrity, and the sovereignty of God. We have seen providential care of God through Joseph's eyes and learned to view the goodness of God through the eye of faith and not the circumstances of life. As we finish up the study of the book of Genesis, may the transformative truths we have learned lodge in our hearts and minds. And may they produce practical righteousness and personal holiness in our lives, all for the glory of King Jesus!

*The LORD bless you, and keep you;
the LORD make His face shine on you,
and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up
His countenance on you, and give you peace.
Numbers 6:24-26*