

Genesis, Part 38

This will be the final segment of our study of Genesis. In our last session, we saw the death of Jacob and his blessings on his children. These “blessings” are actually prophecies concerning the future of those boys and their descendants through the centuries that follow. Though Jacob’s spiritual life had its ups and downs, he died as a man of genuine faith looking forward to the resurrection.

We pick up our study with the last chapter of Genesis and the scene at the deathbed of Jacob.

Genesis 50:1 Then Joseph fell on his father’s face and wept over him and kissed him. ² And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. ³ Forty days were required for it, for that is how many are required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

Joseph was particularly distraught over his father’s death. He threw himself on his father’s body, wept, and kissed him. Regaining his composure, Joseph assumed responsibility for the final arrangements. He ordered the physicians to embalm Jacob. That process took a full forty days. Of course, we know that the Egyptians were experts in embalming the dead. Even today we do not fully understand how they achieved the results they did.

A seventy-day official period of mourning was observed by the Egyptians as well as the Israelites. This was not likely a case of “professional mourning”. They were expressing genuine grief. Joseph was the “savior of Egypt” because of his professional management of the famine and was highly respected as a “man of God”. That respect was extended to Joseph’s father.

Gen 5:4 And when the days of weeping for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, ⁵ ‘My father made me swear, saying, “I am about to die: in my tomb that I hewed out for myself in the land of Canaan, there shall you bury me.” Now

therefore, let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return.’ ”
6 And Pharaoh answered, “Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.” 7 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, 8 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. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company.

After the period of mourning, Joseph requested permission from Pharaoh’s court to fulfill his oath to go up to Canaan to bury his father. And Pharaoh answered, “Go up, and bury your father, as he made you swear.” A large company of dignitaries and family members began to make its way northward with chariots and horsemen providing security. This is a very large funeral procession traveling from Egypt up into the land of Canaan. Not only did it include the adult males of Jacob’s family but also many from the court of Pharaoh along with all their servants and security escorts. Verse 9 says, “It was a very great company.” And it was – probably the largest (and longest in distance traveled) funeral procession ever.

Only the flocks, herds, the women, and the children of the Hebrews and probably some servants remained behind in Egypt. Some speculate that was because they were Pharaoh’s guarantee of the return of Joseph. Joseph’s statement in verse 5, “Let me please go up and bury my father. Then I will return” suggests this possibility.

Gen 50:10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. 11 When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians.” Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim; it is beyond the Jordan.

The burial procession, perhaps for political reasons, did not travel the usual route to Canaan. It traveled around the Dead Sea and up the east side of the Jordan. The group paused for seven days at Atad, a threshing floor near the Jordan. There Joseph observed another week of mourning for his

father. Apparently this was the custom of that area. The local Canaanites were much impressed with this display of grief and gave the spot the name Abel Mizraim, “mourning of the Egyptians”.

Gen 5:12 Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them, ¹³ for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. ¹⁴ 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.

Finally, the mission was completed. Jacob was laid to rest by his sons in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre. The Egyptian dignitaries left this final rite to the family alone. After the burial, the entire group returned to Egypt.

You may wonder why Jacob was not buried with his wife Rachel in Bethlehem, which was probably not more than 20 miles further north. The reason may be stated here when it says, “Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place.” Abraham had bought the cave, and Jacob wanted to be buried with his fathers in a place bought and paid for to make sure that he would stay in the land. He was buried with the other patriarchs. They all had the same hope of resurrection. This was the land God had given him; he did not belong to the world (Egypt). Perhaps we have a spiritual lesson here as well: not only does the believer’s spirit go to heaven when he or she dies, but the body will also be taken from this world at the resurrection.

God’s Good Purposes

Gen 50:15 When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him.” ¹⁶ So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, “Your father gave this command before he died: ¹⁷ ‘Say to Joseph, “Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you.” ’ And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father.” Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

I believe this scene takes place right after the death of Jacob rather than right after the funeral where we see it inserted here. Joseph's brothers completely misjudged the forgiveness which their brother had offered to them seventeen years earlier. They thought Joseph had refrained from punishing them out of consideration for their father. Now the brothers feared Joseph's wrath. "They sent a message to Joseph" that Jacob had left instructions that he should forgive them of their transgressions against him forty years earlier. The brothers added to this plea from Jacob their own petition for forgiveness. Joseph was moved to tears by this appeal.

Gen 50:18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."

The prophecy God revealed to Joseph in his dreams has repeatedly come true. The "sheaves of grain" (his brothers) are bowing down to Joseph.

Gen 50:19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?"

Joseph gives God the glory in every case. And here is one of the most remarkable verses in the Bible.

Gen 50:20 As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

God has future purposes for his own that we cannot see. Everything that happened in Joseph's life, good and bad, had God's plan behind it, and he here recognizes that fact.

Gen 50:21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

When the brothers heard of Joseph's response, they came and threw themselves before him as his slaves. Again Joseph calmed their fears. He was not going to assume the role of God to judge his brothers. God had overruled their evil intent in selling him to Egypt and had brought good out of it. This was God's plan for saving the lives of the covenant people! So

Joseph reassured his brothers with these kind words, promising to continue to provide for them and their children

The Death of Joseph

Gen 50:22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's house. Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ And Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation. The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph's own. ²⁴ And Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." ²⁶ So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Genesis closes with the account of Joseph's death. He lived to see his great-grandchildren. When he died at age 110 he had held office in Egypt for some eighty years.

He predicted that someday God would take his brothers and their families out of Egypt to the Promised Land. This would not be a natural tribal migration but would be the result of divine intervention. "God will visit you and bring you up out of this land..." (v. 24).

Joseph insisted that when this day of deliverance came, his family should carry his bones with them to the Promised Land. Having secured this commitment from his family, Joseph died. They embalmed him and placed him in a coffin in Egypt (50:26). Joseph left explicit instructions that they should take his body with them back to Canaan when they would be "visited by God". This of course refers to the Exodus. Like for Jacob, Joseph's hope was in the resurrection and the ultimate fulfillment of the land grant provisions of the Abrahamic Covenant that they would possess and live in the land forever. This is mentioned in Hebrews.

Heb 11:22 By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.

Moses and the children of Israel honored this request and took Joseph's bones with them when they left Egypt.

Why was Joseph not taken up to Canaan when he died? It is obvious that Joseph is a national hero whom the Egyptians revered, and his family was likely not permitted to remove his body from Egypt.

That said, one might ask why do we not find monuments to Joseph in ancient Egyptian ruins or writings about his deeds on the walls and columns of ancient Egypt. One argument for that is the Hebrews became hated in Egypt, as we shall see in our next study of the Book of the Exodus. As such, any references to them were obliterated. They left Egypt under less than positive conditions, a departure that was not a “happy parting” to be fondly remembered. Nations do not erect monuments to battlefield defeats, especially one on such a devastating level. (We will speak more on this subject later.)

And this is how the Book of Genesis ends. It began with God creating the heaven and the earth, and it ended with a coffin in Egypt. What was created perfect had become corrupted by sin way back in the Garden, and its effect has been felt throughout all of mankind since and will remain a problem until the end of human history.

Joseph’s Tombstone

Joseph was carried up to Canaan during the Exodus and buried with his ancestors. Since his body was embalmed, possibly it is still there in that cave somewhere.

But let’s suppose for a moment that there was a grave marker set up in the field in Shechem. What might have been written under the name “Joseph” on such a stone? There is usually only space for one brief phrase, or maybe a sentence at most. Whatever words we might place on someone’s tombstone, they must be brief, and they ought, in a very pointed way, to tell us something important about the person buried below.

So, given that set of guidelines, what might we have engraved on Joseph’s gravestone? What was the main theme of his life? And how would we state it? What would we put on Joseph’s tombstone? Perhaps this simple phrase: “God meant it for good.” How appropriate to take Joseph’s exact words from Genesis 50:20 and have them written on his grave marker!

Because this is the main lesson of Joseph's life: "God meant it for good." So much heartache, frustration, and wrong marks the timeline of Joseph's 110 years. But in all of this, "God meant it for good." Paul wrote about this in Romans.

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

God "works" these "all things" – not some things, but ALL things – together for good. Whatever the "all things" are, whether good or bad, God has a way of making them turn out to the benefit of those who are His own. That word translated as "work" is *sunergeo* and means to put forth power together with and thereby to assist. We get our modern English word "synergy" from this.

Think through the chain of events that Joseph was encapsulating in that statement, "God meant it for good," and think how they worked out for good in his life:

- Had Joseph not been sold into slavery, he would never have ended up in Egypt.
- Had Joseph not ended up in Egypt, he would never have gained distinction in Potiphar's house.
- Had he not gained distinction in Potiphar's house, he would never have been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife.
- Had he not been falsely accused by Potiphar's wife, he would never have ended up in jail.
- So far, things do not seem to be working out for good! But think on ...
- Had Joseph not ended up in jail, he would never have interpreted the cupbearer's dream.
- Had he not interpreted the cupbearer's dream, he would never have been called upon to interpret Pharaoh's dream.
- Had he not interpreted Pharaoh's dream, Egypt would never have been prepared for the coming famine.
- Had Egypt not been prepared for the coming famine, many in Egypt would have died—and so would Joseph and his brothers!
- And had Joseph and his brothers died, there would have been no Israel and, therefore, no Messiah!

All the evil in Joseph's life, everything done unfairly to him – it all was used by God to bless Joseph and his family, not to mention to bless all of Egypt. Joseph's whole life is one long trail of evidence that demonstrates how God uses the worst of circumstances to turn our lives into something useful and profitable! And the profit of Joseph's suffering continues down to this very day! As believers in Jesus, we benefit from the fact that Joseph's suffering kept the family tree of the Savior alive!

The practical applications of this discovery are many. We learn that, even when others are harming us, they are, unwittingly, doing us good—and therefore we can forgive, as Joseph did! We learn that God is in control, and can be trusted even in the darkest hours. And we learn not to judge our circumstances too quickly! If Joseph had measured God's love simply by what he could see in the here and now, he would have lost his faith long before he ever got to chapter 50!

How much more spiritually healthy we would be if we could get Joseph's epitaph, "God meant it for good," engraved onto our hearts! So much of the Christian life is wrapped up in believing this truth!

- The ability to forgive is attached to our acceptance of Genesis 50:20.
- The ability to cope with hardship is tied up in believing Genesis 50:20.
- The question of why God permits evil is directly related to Genesis 50:20.

This is an inestimably important verse and lesson.

Even understanding the gospel itself is difficult if we do not understand and believe the message of Genesis 50:20. For skeptics sometimes ask, "If God is really all-powerful, and if God is really loving, and if Jesus was really God's Son ... how could an all-powerful God allow his own Son to be murdered so gruesomely?" The answer is the same as in Genesis 50:20, isn't it? "[They] meant evil against [him], *but God meant it for good* in order to ... preserve many people alive." The story of Joseph is so much like the story of Jesus! In both cases, God allowed one man to go through tremendous suffering in order, in the end, to bring about rescue for all God's people! This is simply the way God works. If you are God's child, and if you suffer, God means it for good! And knowing such should keep us calm when we are the ones experiencing the suffering.

So when you struggle and when you suffer, remember Joseph. Remember that his brothers meant evil against him, “but God meant it for good.” And more than that, remember Jesus—whose suffering was more excruciating than anything you or I will endure, yet who brought about the world’s greatest good! Remember the death of Jesus, and all the good it brought about, and you will be able to sing with faith,

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust him for his grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face!*

Joseph as a Type of Christ

Messiah is depicted in the Old Testament in many ways. Many of the stories and events are pictures or "type" to point Israel (and us) to Messiah, His Work, and to help identify Messiah when he comes. The story of Joseph in the OT is a perfect picture of Messiah. Let's examine Joseph's life and see what it tells us about Messiah and in turn about Jesus as Messiah. There are many similarities between Joseph and Christ. Some list 60 or more. What follows are just a few of those.

Joseph was beloved by his father (Gen 37:3). Joseph was the favorite of the twelve sons of Jacob also called Israel. The twelve sons represent Israel and indeed the twelve tribes of Israel are traced to the twelve brothers. The twelve brothers are a "type" or symbol for Israel, and Joseph is his father's favorite son. Consider that Jesus was a Jew, a son of Israel, and the favorite son of the Father in Heaven (Matt. 17:5; Luke 3:2).

Joseph had a dream that his brothers would bow down to him (Gen. 37:5-8). Already jealous of him, this did not endear his brothers to him. Though Israel rejected Messiah and at the time even hated Him, all Israel will bow to Him at His Second Coming (Rom. 14:11).

Joseph was sent by his father to look for his brothers (Gen. 38:13) who were supposed to be with the flock in Shekem. He found them instead in Dolthan (Gen 13:17). Shekem means a place of blessing or grace, but Dolthan is associated with the law or legalism. Jesus as Messiah was also sent by His Father to find His brothers Israel. He found them not in grace and trusting in the Father but bound in the legalism of the Law.

Joseph's brothers rejected him (Gen. 37:20) just as Israel rejected Jesus as Messiah. Joseph's brothers took his fine coat away from him. The coat symbolized his favored status (Gen. 37:23). Jesus' fine robe was taken from Him. Its purple color was the color reserved for royalty. Commoners cast lots for it at the Cross (John 19:5; 23). As Joseph's favored position was rejected by his brothers, so did Jesus' brothers reject his favored position. Just as Joseph's brothers hated him and sought to destroy him, so did Jesus' brother Israelites hate Him and seek to destroy Him.

Left in a pit by his brothers, Joseph was sold for the price of a slave (Gen. 37:28) and so was Jesus (Matt. 26:15).

In Egypt, Joseph was in the house of Potiphar as a slave and was tempted by Potiphar's wife, which he resisted (Gen. 39:7-12). Jesus was tempted as we are but resisted (Luke 4:2; Heb. 4:15). Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39:13-19). Jesus was falsely accused (John 11:53).

Joseph was sent to prison (Gen. 39:12), from which there was no expectation he would come out alive. Jesus went into the grave and none expected he would be resurrected. Joseph came out of prison (Gen. 41:14), and Jesus came out of the grave (John 11:25; Acts 1:22).

Pharaoh gave Joseph a name when he was able to interpret his dream (Gen. 41:45). That name means "Revealer of Secrets." Jesus is the revealer of secrets as the judge.

Joseph was given a Gentile bride by Pharaoh (Gen. 41:45). Rejected by Israel, God is in the process of giving Messiah a Gentile bride, the Gentile believers that comprise the Bride of Christ, the Church. As Joseph's bride was revealed to his brothers, so shall Messiah's bride be revealed to Israel at the Second Coming.

The famine that Joseph revealed to Pharaoh when interpreting his dream was seven years long (Gen. 41:54). The horrible times of the Tribulation will be seven years long. Joseph's brothers suffered in the famine and sought deliverance in Egypt from the Gentiles (Gen. 42:3). During the tribulation Israel will seek help from the Gentiles and establish a treaty with the Antichrist.

Joseph's brothers did not at first recognize him (Gen. 42:8). They had last seen him as a humble and weak boy, but now he is a ruler with great power second only to Pharaoh. Israel last saw Messiah as someone weak that they killed. When they see Him again it will be as a great warrior-ruler, the Lion of Judah! (Rev. 19:11-16)

Joseph revealed himself to his brothers, "I am Joseph!" (Gen. 45:3-4) And he and his brothers wept together (Gen. 43:14-15). Jesus will reveal

Himself at the Second Coming and gather His brothers Israel to Him, and together they will weep with joy at Israel's redemption.

God sent Joseph to preserve and deliver Israel (Gen. 45:7). God sent Jesus to preserve and redeem Israel. Joseph brought his brothers to a place of safety and in effect redeemed them. Joseph forgave his brothers even for all the terrible hurt they had sought to bring upon him. Jesus as Messiah will bring Israel out of a place of extreme danger (the Tribulation) to a place of blessing at the Second Coming (Kingdom). God will forgive Israel, even for what was done to Him by Israel, and make a new covenant with them (Jer. 31:31). God will even forgive you and me for all the hurt we have done to Him.

Get this straight! God will not ever reject Israel completely! Israel will be chastened by God, but Israel will NEVER be rejected! God will never reject His chosen believers either. We may be chastened but never rejected.

Joseph's brothers fall on their knees and in effect worship him (Gen. 50:18) just as in Joseph's dream. And so shall all Israel fall on their knees and worship the One that they have pierced.

The story of Joseph is a beautiful picture of God's love for us and His redemptive work on the Cross.