

Genesis 50

This chapter closes Moses' account of the life of the patriarchs, the life of Jacob, and the life of Joseph. He will fast-forward a few centuries when he picks up Israel's history at Exodus 1:1. Yet, it is certain that Exodus continues the story began in Genesis 1:1. If there is a theme which runs through this chapter, it is faith in God's promise for the Israelites to return to Canaan.

TRANSLATION - 50:1-8:

1 Then Joseph fell down before his father and he wept over him and he kissed him. **2** Then Joseph commanded his servants, the healers, to embalm his father and the healers embalmed Israel. **3** Then they fulfilled for him forty days, because thus they fulfilled the days of the embalming and they wept for him and Egypt wept for him seventy days. **4** They passed the days of his mourning and Joseph spoke to the house of Pharaoh, saying, "If, please, I have found favor in your eyes, speak, please in the ears of Pharaoh, saying, **5** 'My father made me swear, saying, 'Behold, I myself am dying. Bury me where I dug for me in the land of Canaan there. You will bury me.' Even now let me go up, please, and let me bury my father and let me return.'"

6 Then Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father just as he made you swear." **7** So Joseph went up to bury his father and they went up with him all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house and all the elders of the land of Egypt. **8** And all the house of Joseph and his brothers and the house of his father, only little ones and their flock and their cattle they left in the land of Goshen.

WORDS:

"To weep" (verses 1, 3, 17) was seen first at 21:16 but see 42:24 for a list of all the references to Joseph weeping. "Healers" (verse 2) are trained medical personnel who, in this case, oversee the practice of embalming. "To embalm" is used only in this context (50:2, 26) and at Song of Solomon 2:13. "Mourning" is found only here and at 35:8. "Favor" was first seen in the life of Noah at 6:8; see "Words" there. "To swear" (verses 5, 6, 24-25) is found 186 times in the Old Testament; 19 times in Genesis; 6 times in the life of Joseph. "To leave" (verse 9; 214 times) means to "forsake, abandon."

ARCHAEOLOGY:

This is the only context in the Bible which deals with mummification (of Jacob and of Joseph). It was a well-known practice among Egyptians and was closely associated with the cult of Osiris. Clearly, it related to their conception of the afterlife; the body had to be preserved for the spirit to return. It is also clear from this text that there were no religious connotations to the practice among the Hebrews. It was simply to preserve the bodies of the patriarchs so they could be transported back to Canaan for burial, in Joseph's case, after several hundred years. For the Egyptians, 72 days were set aside for mourning the Pharaoh so that Jacob's mourning almost equaled that of the pharaoh's.

The embalming process would take 40 days, as we see in this text. The organs would be removed dried out while the body was dried. Then the organs would be replaced. The body would be washed with wine filled with spices and then anointed with oil and resin. The body would be wrapped in linen with amulets placed at certain locations (perhaps not in Jacob or Joseph's situation if the amulets related to paganism). Then resin would be finally poured over the whole body.

COMMENTS:

Joseph was an emotional man, beginning with 42:24 (see also 43:30; 45:2, 14-15; 46:29; 50:17). God had promised Jacob, before he came down into Egypt, that Joseph would close his eyes at death (46:4). Joseph is present when his dad breathes his final breath and

Joseph weeps. With his authority as vizier and his wealth, Joseph had his father embalmed. He did not do so under the same theological beliefs as the Egyptians, but rather to preserve the body to transport it to Canaan. It was a 40-day process, which we also know from Egyptian sources. They wept and lamented a total of 70 days, which likely includes the 40-days associated with the embalming.

After the days of mourning, Joseph sent a message to Pharaoh through his household servants, asking for permission to take Jacob's body to Canaan. It may have been improper for Joseph to go before Pharaoh dressed in his funeral clothes. Verse 4 illustrates the respect Joseph had for the Pharaoh. He informs Pharaoh that Jacob made him swear an oath (cf. 47:29-31) that he would take his father's body back to Canaan. While he would be buried in a cave which had already been dug, it is possible that Jacob himself had dug also a portion of the cave in order to make a cavity in the wall for himself, perhaps also for Leah (cf. 49:31). Thus, Joseph asks Pharaoh to allow him to go up to Canaan, bury his father, and he promises to return.

Pharaoh appreciates the oath made between father and son (50:7) and gives Joseph permission. Verse 7 begins a long description of the funeral procession that will travel from Egypt to Hebron to the cave of Machpelah. Servants of Pharaoh, out of respect for their vizier, travel with Joseph including the elders of his household as well as elders in the land of Egypt. These would be leaders of various areas of the land of Egypt, perhaps politicians (as we would see them) from every rank. Also, the household of Joseph and his brothers and their families all went, except their smallest ones, their flocks and their herds. These all stayed in Goshen.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Jacob's desire to be buried in the land of Canaan illustrates his conviction that Jehovah God would bring them back to Canaan after their stay in Egypt (46:4). Out of respect for his oath to his father but also motivated out of the same deep conviction in God's promise, Joseph fulfills his father's last wish.

TRANSLATION - 50:9-13:

9 So there went up with him even a chariot and horsemen and they were a very heavy camp. **10** They came to the threshing floor of Atad which [was] across from the Jordan and they mourned there a great mourning and very heavy and he made for his father a funeral of seven days. **11** He saw the inhabitants of the land of the Canaanites, the funeral in the threshing floor of Atad and they said, "A great funeral this [is] for the Egyptians." Thus he called there, 'A funeral of the Egyptians,' which [is] across from the Jordan.

12 So his sons did for him just as he commanded them. **13** Then his sons carried him up to the land of Canaan and they buried him in the caves of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought, the field a possession for a burial from Ephron the Hittite, before Mamre.

WORDS:

"Chariot" and "horsemen" (verse 9) are found only here in Genesis. The first word is used 120 times, concentrated in Exodus 14. It is also the word for "upper millstone." The latter word is used 57 times, again concentrated in Exodus 14. "Camp" means "camp or army," used 215 times, found also concentrated in Exodus. "Threshing floor" (verse 10) is used 37 times, only here (50:10-11) in Genesis. "Atad" might be transliterated, as I have, indicating a location or it could be translated as "bramble" or "thorns." It is used 6 times. "Jordan" was first seen at 13:10-11. "To mourn," the verb, is used at 23:2 and here in Genesis, of 30 times, meaning "to lament, wail, mourn." The noun, used only here in Genesis, is used 16 times, meaning "wailing, mourning, or funeral ceremony." "Funeral" is used 24 times, first in 27:41; here at 50:10-11. "Possession" (verse 13) was first seen at 17:8.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Mamre was found first at 13:18 and is only found in Genesis (18:1; 23:17, 19; 25:9; 35:27; 49:30; 50:13). Scholars do not know where the threshing floor of Atad was located. Therefore, they do not know exactly what route the Israelites took on their way to Hebron, Machpelah, to bury Jacob. The designation “across the Jordan” is not helpful since, in Joshua 12:1, 7, the same phrase is used to refer to the east of the Jordan and the west of the Jordan.

If the designation refers to the east of the Jordan, the funeral procession moved east, south of the Dead Sea, perhaps joining the King’s Highway, and moved north to some point where they could cross the Jordan River. Once they crossed, they would have ascended from 1,200’ below sea level to a few thousand feet up, to travel southwest about 25 miles to reach Hebron. It would have been about 330 miles from Goshen to Hebron along this route.

The more direct route would place the threshing floor of Atad on the west of the Jordan, about 130 miles less than the eastern route. Again, there is not yet a way to know for sure which route Joseph followed. If he followed the former route, it may have been similar to the route Moses’ nation took when they left Egypt hundreds of years later.

COMMENTS:

The funeral procession, Joseph’s entourage, consisted also of a military escort, chariots and horsemen and it was a large group. Canaan was under the influence of Egypt so this was probably more for support of Joseph than from fear of attack. The first stop mentioned is the threshing floor of Atad, beyond the Jordan. See “Archeology” for comments on the location and route. Here, the funeral procession made a stop and had something of a funeral service here, which lasted seven days. The lamenting among Jacob’s family was great and sorrowful.

It was so sorrowful that it impressed the inhabitants of Canaan. “This is a heavy mourning for the Egyptians.” For that reason, they made a play on the word for “funeral” by calling the place “Abel-Mizraim” or “Funeral of the Egyptians.”

Moses summarizes the sons’ behavior at verse 12: they did just as Jacob had commanded them. The sons buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, which Abraham had bought from Ephron the Hittite.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The purchase of the cave of Machpelah took up a whole chapter (chapter 23) and has been referred to in 25:9-11 and 49:29-33. This repetition illustrates how important was the purchase of the cave in the lives and thinking of the patriarchs. It illustrated their confidence that God would fulfill His plan to bring Abraham’s family to the land of Canaan.

Contemporaries of Moses - “Chariots” and “horsemen” will be seen again in Exodus 14 (14:9, 17-18, 23, 26, 28) at the exodus.

TRANSLATION - 50:14-21:

14 Then Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all those going up with him to bury his father, after they buried his father. **15** Then the brothers of Joseph saw that their father died and they said to him, “Joseph bore a grudge and he will surely return on us all the evil which we showed him.”

16 Then they commanded Joseph, saying, “Your father commanded before he died, saying, **17** ‘Thus you all will say to Joseph, ‘Oh! Take away, please, the rebellion of your brothers and their sin that evil they showed you. Even now, raise up, please, for the rebellion of the servants of the God of your father.’” And Joseph wept at their words to him.

18 Then also his brothers went and fell before him and they said, “We are, to you, for servants.”

19 Then Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid because in place of God [am] I? **20** But you, you all reckoned to me for evil; God reckoned it for good in order to do this day to preserve a great people. **21** “But now, do not fear. I shall sustain you all and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke to their heart.

WORDS:

“To bear a grudge” (verse 15) or “harbor animosity” is only found 6 times, three times in Genesis: 27:41 (relative to Esau’s attitude toward Jacob himself); 49:23; 50:15. “Evil” (verses 15, 17, 20) is the normal word for evil or calamity, first seen at 2:9. “To show” (verses 15, 17) is used 37 times (only here in Genesis) and means to “complete, finish, render, do, recompense.” “Rebellion” (verse 17) was first seen at 31:36. It means “transgression, rebellion, crime.” The verb is used 41 times. “Sin” was first seen at 4:7. The verb “to be afraid” is used 317 times in the OT. “To reckon” (verse 20) is used 124 times, first at 15:6. “To preserve” was first seen at 6:19-20. “To sustain” (verse 21) means “to comprehend, sustain, endure.” It is found 38 times. “Little ones” was first seen at 34:29. “To comfort” was found first at 6:6.

GRAMMAR:

“To surely return” (verse 15) translates the infinitive absolute and imperfect of the same verbs to express the emphatic Hebrew construction.

COMMENTS:

Once the burial was over, as he promised, Joseph returned to Egypt. Beginning at verse 15, we have a long-delayed discussion between the brothers and Joseph about how they had treated him. Our guilt over our own wrong, sometimes, is so powerful that we find it hard to believe that anyone, much less God, will forgive us. The brothers fear that Joseph has harbored a grudge against them all these decades and kept it concealed on behalf of their father. The deeply emotional discussion between Joseph and his brothers happened back in chapter 45. It appeared then that Joseph was doing all he could to let his brothers know that he had forgiven them. Either they could not forgive themselves or they did not trust Joseph that he had forgiven them.

So, the brothers send a message to Joseph, the vizier, stating that Jacob had left a message for Joseph to forgive them. We have no record of this statement so it appears from the record that the brothers are fabricating this conversation. Verse 17 is a strong emotional statement: “Please forgive, I beg you...” Notice the three different words for “sin” used in this verse: “transgression, sin, wrong.” Again, in verse 17, the brothers echo their father’s words: “Please, now, forgive...” All Joseph could do at first hearing their plea was to weep (cf. 50:1). He wept at their sin. He wept at their fear. He wept at their misunderstandings.

His brothers came before him and fell down before him, just as his dreams of youth had predicted (37:5-11) and they offer to be his servants (50:18). But, Joseph will not judge them in the place of God. “There is a considerable contrast between Adam and Eve and Joseph. Genesis begins by telling us about a primeval couple who tried to become like God, and ends by telling us about a man who denied he was in God’s place. Adam and Eve attempted to wipe out the dividing line between humanity and deity. Joseph refuses to try to cross that line. Joseph will only be God’s instrument, never his substitute.”¹

Joseph’s statement of faith in verse 20 echos his statement of faith in God’s providential workings back in 45:5, 7, 8, 9. Joseph believed strongly in the providence of God and all that had happened to him was God working out His plans to save lives. Yes, the brothers had intended evil against Joseph but God was able to bring things around for the good of Joseph and his family. God’s plan was to “preserve life.”

Therefore, Joseph repeats himself: “Do not be afraid” (50: 19, 21). When he says, “I will provide for you,” he is emphatic and personal, emphasizing that *he* will provide for them. He will provide for their little ones, the next generation. It took further words to reassure the brothers as Joseph comforted them and “spoke to their heart” (literally), speaking kindly to them.

¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 18-50*, 705.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Joseph, apparently, had not given any indication to his brothers that he harbored animosity toward them. He had even tried to alleviate their fears (45:5), to no avail.

Contemporaries of Moses - God will command Israel to leave vengeance in His hands: Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35.

NT writers - Paul points out in Romans 8:28 that God is able to work all things together for our good. Paul will also command Christians to leave vengeance in the hands of a just God: Rom. 12:19; 1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Pet. 4:19.

TRANSLATION - 50:22-26:

22 So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and the house of his father. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. **23** Then Joseph saw to Ephraim, three sons, even the sons of Machir, son of Manasseh there was born on the knees of Joseph. **24** Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am dying and God will surely visit you all and He will bring you all up from this land to the land which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." **25** So Joseph made to swear the sons of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you all and you all will bring up my bones from this [place.]" **26** So Joseph died, the son of a one hundred and ten years. And they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt.

WORDS:

"To visit" (verse 24) is found four times in verses 24-25, first at 21:1. "Bones" was first seen at 2:23. "Coffin" (verse 25) is found only here in Genesis, but it is used 202 times and is the word used for the "ark" of the covenant.

GRAMMAR:

"To surely visit" (verses 24, 25) translates the Hebrew emphatic construction with the infinitive absolute and the imperfect of the same verb.

COMMENTS:

Joseph lived some 70 years after he is reunited with his family. It will be about 6 decades before Joseph, himself, will die and be embalmed. The text states twice (50:22, 26) that Joseph lived 110 years. Many references in Egyptian sources comment on the blessing of living to be 110 years old. Joseph was blessed by God to see the third generation, Ephraim's sons as well as Manasseh's son. Machir will be the forefather of the Gileadites, which is probably the reason why he is named. To "be born on the knees" likely refers to Joseph adopting the boys as his own (see Ruth 4:16-17).

Verse 24 jumps forward to the end of Joseph's life, at 110 years old. Joseph anticipated his own death but he, like the patriarchs before him, had faith in God. God will take care of his family and will bring them up out of Egypt to the land "which God promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob" (15:12-16). This is the first time the three patriarchs are found listed together. So, Joseph had his brothers (which might be used more generally to refer to his family as opposed to his 11 brothers), the "sons of Israel," swear to carry his body out of Egypt, at some point in the future when God would lead them out.

The book of Genesis ends with Joseph dying at the age of 110 years, having saved the Egyptians, the Canaanites, and his family from a severe, 7-year famine. He, too, was embalmed as the vizier of Egypt. Yet, there was not someone to take his body out of Egypt, at this point, as he had done for his father. So, Joseph's body remained in Egypt until God would fulfill His promise. The last words in the book of Genesis are "in Egypt."

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries of Moses - Moses will echo Joseph's words, in Exodus 3:16 (cf. 4:31): "God will surely visit you." Moses will remind the Israelites that they have to take Joseph's body out of the land of Egypt when they leave (Exo. 13:19).

Later Hebrew writers - Job was blessed to see the fourth generation in his family (42:16). It is a blessing to see one's grandchildren (Psa. 128:6; Prov. 17:6; Isa. 53:10). Machir's firstborn son will be Gilead (1 Chron. 7:14) whose descendants will have a role in Israelite history. Joshua will oversee Joseph's burial in Shechem (Josh. 24:32).

NT writers - The Hebrew writer will point to Joseph's desire to be buried in Canaan as an example of faith (11:22).