

## But God 4-27-08

Genesis 50

We have come to the end of our time in the book of Genesis, though we will have one more sermon to follow. The book of beginnings ends with death, but in both these deaths there is the looking forward to another beginning, a beginning in which a deliverer will lead the Hebrews to the Promised Land, and a beginning in the heavenly city with those who have gone before. The history of the world has led up to the nurturing of a little clan in Egypt. This clan is the heir of the promises of the God that appeared to their forefathers. (Genesis 12:2-3) We saw the prediction that indicated that Judah was now the line through whom the ultimate Deliverer would come. (Genesis 49:10) They will return to the land of Canaan, and the LORD will bless the world through them. They will become a great nation.

In this passage, the last great patriarch has just died. Jacob passed on at 147 years of age. He and Joseph had a special relationship. The separation would be difficult for Joseph. <sup>1</sup> *Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him.* The more tightly you cling to things in this life, the harder it is to let go of them when the time comes to say good-by. Eventually we must say good-by to everything in this life for, like Jacob, we will be making our voyage home. What can you take with you? What is worth investing in? Only our relationship with the Savior, the truth we learn, and redeemed loved ones can make the journey. (1 Timothy 6:7)

It is the only time in the Bible we read of someone kissing the dead. The three actions (throw, wept and kissed) speak of the deep love they had for one another. The NIV leaves out the word "face"; "Joseph threw himself on his father's face". This reminds of God's promise to Jacob that Joseph's own hand would close his eyes. (46:4)

There are only two cases of embalming in Scripture, and both are in this chapter. The seventy days of mourning probably included the 40 days for the embalming procedure.

In verse 4, Joseph did not speak to Pharaoh directly, but instead asked Pharaoh's court to make the request to Pharaoh for him. Though he was second in command of Egypt, he asked humbly, *"If I have found favor in your eyes, speak to Pharaoh for me."* Perhaps the Pharaoh was aging and only allowed audiences with his immediate court. Or it may be that Egyptian religion had taboos against talking with someone who had recently handled the dead.

They explained to Pharaoh the promise Joseph had made to bury his father in Canaan, and Pharaoh gave permission for the journey. The sons of Jacob all went as well as the dignitaries of Pharaoh's court and all the other dignitaries of Egypt. They went with an armed escort. <sup>9</sup> *Chariots and horsemen also went up with him. It was a very large company.*

**Commented [notes1]:** 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Gen 12:2-3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes2]:** 10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

Gen 49:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes3]:** 7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

1 Tim 6:7 (NIV)

**Commented [notes4]:** 4 I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes."

Gen 46:4 (NIV)

<sup>10</sup> When they reached the threshing floor of Atad, near the Jordan, they lamented loudly and bitterly; and there Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. It is amazing to me that Jacob held such a beloved status that they would weep so. Through most of his life he seemed distant and distracted, but at the end he became the man, Israel, one who prevails with God. (Genesis 32:28)

Some of the sons were no doubt mourning for the pain they had caused their father during those 20 plus years that he grieved over the supposed loss of Joseph. (Genesis 37:35) Many of the Egyptians were probably mourning because of Joseph's grief. They had grown to love and appreciate Joseph, and seeing him grieve so deeply caused a sympathetic reaction in them.

<sup>11</sup> When the Canaanites who lived there saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "The Egyptians are holding a solemn ceremony of mourning." That is why that place near the Jordan is called Abel Mizraim. This place of mourning was just inside the Promised Land. Back in Canaan again, Joseph could go no further without another 7 days of mourning. Abel Mizraim means the mourning of the Egyptians.

Another interesting point is that they apparently took the same long route that the Israelites would take in the Exodus. Many of the descriptive words are the same words you will see in the Exodus. The great difference is that the chariots will be there to oppose them rather than to protect them.

They placed Jacob beside his first wife, Leah, in the cave of Machpelah. His parents and grandparents are also buried there. I thought it was ironic that after a life of preferring Rachel and her sons to all the others, he ended up buried by his first wife who bore his first four sons. Leah fought all her life to have his attention, and now she is the one by whom his body lies in death.

They returned to Egypt, as Joseph had promised Pharaoh. It makes me wonder if he had a choice in the matter. Would Pharaoh have let him go if he had not promised to return to Egypt? Is this an indication of why they didn't return earlier?

Back in Egypt, the brothers begin worrying about retribution. They thought, "Perhaps Joseph never retaliated against us out of honor for our father. Now that Dad is dead, what will he do to us?" That's human nature isn't it, to get even? <sup>16</sup> So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: <sup>17</sup> 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

In their minds, it was a good idea to hold him to the words of his beloved father. He would never know if they made it up or not. They were doing what they had done to Jacob, lying about the facts. It appears they had fabricated this story like they fabricated the story of the animal killing Joseph. (Genesis 37:31-32) The lesson hadn't quite sunk in yet. They are still trying to escape justice they deserve by lying about the facts instead of receiving mercy. This is our fallen human nature. And

**Commented [notes5]:** 28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."  
Gen 32:28 (NIV)

**Commented [notes6]:** 35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.  
Gen 37:35 (NIV)

**Commented [notes7]:** 31 Then they got Joseph's robe, slaughtered a goat and dipped the robe in the blood.  
32 They took the ornamented robe back to their father and said, "We found this. Examine it to see whether it is your son's robe."  
Gen 37:31-32 (NIV)

when we are caught in a lie, we just call it misspeaking or a bad memory. Lying indicates that we are more worried about what man thinks about us than what God thinks. (Galatians 1:10) They were making this desperate but lying plea to save their own skins. <sup>18</sup> His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

**Commented [notes8]:** 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.  
Gal 1:10 (NIV)

Joseph's response was to weep. I don't think they expected that. Why was he weeping? Did he think his father didn't realize how much he had spiritually grown? I don't think so. I think he saw right through their scam. His answer shows us that he understood exactly where they were coming from. He wept because they didn't see he was changed man. This deception belies a lack of believing his sincerity. Joseph thought they had forgiven one another and no longer held anything between one another. (Genesis 45:15) They showed that wasn't quite true, at least on their part. Have you ever tried to convince someone you were sincere, but they just wouldn't believe it?

**Commented [notes9]:** 15 And he kissed all his brothers and wept over them. Afterward his brothers talked with him.  
Gen 45:15 (NIV)

He may have also wept because they hadn't matured like he had hoped. He saw such great signs of repentance in them, but they were now resorting to their old ways. What could he do to help them? How could he get them to see that the ways of the natural man bear bad fruit? (Galatians 6:8)

**Commented [notes10]:** The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.  
Gal 6:8 (NIV)

<sup>19</sup> But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? First, he told them not to fear. Fear of man was motivating them to sin. It is often the motivation for sin. Joseph was saying, "Don't fear me, fear God!" He's the One who ultimately will judge man for their sins. (John 8:50) Joseph was declaring that he was not their judge. It wasn't up to him to dish out justice. God determines our lot in this life and the next. Fearing man causes us to sin. (Proverbs 29:25) Fearing the justice of God helps us turn from sinful ways that are destructive to us and others.

**Commented [notes11]:** 50 I am not seeking glory for myself; but there is one who seeks it, and he is the judge.  
John 8:50 (NIV)

Joseph went on to speak one of the most instructive verses of the book of Genesis. <sup>20</sup> You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. This is Old Testament source for one of our favorite verses in the New Testament, Romans 8:28. <sup>28</sup> And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

**Commented [notes12]:** 25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.  
Prov 29:25 (NIV)

Joseph's brothers admitted they had sinned in wronging their brother. Joseph didn't cover over that fact. *You intended to harm me...* They did wrong, evil. It was deplorable. It was selfish and cruel. Oh but thank God for the next two words, two of my favorite in all of Scripture, "But God..." You were evil, but God... It's a repeated theme in Genesis. Abraham lied about his wife and almost lost her to Abimelech, "But God came to Abimelech in a dream..." (Genesis 20:3) Jacob told his wives that Laban changed his wages ten times, "but God has not allowed him to harm me." (Genesis 31:7) And in 48:21 Jacob told Joseph he was dying, "but God will be with you..." Haven't you seen the "but God" refrain in your own life?

**Commented [notes13]:** 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman."  
Gen 20:3 (NIV)

**Commented [notes14]:** 7 Yet your father has deceived me and changed my wages ten times, but God did not allow him to hurt me.  
Gen 31:7 (NKJV)

**Commented [notes15]:** 21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers."  
Gen 48:21 (NKJV)

I was born in sin. (Psalm 51:5) I chose to live in self-centeredness. I harmed others to get what I wanted. I was living in rebellion towards my Creator who gave me so much, but God... Hallelujah for those words that speak of the intervention of God.

**Commented [notes16]:** 5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.  
Psalms 51:5 (NIV)

You and I were self-centered, ungrateful, covetous rebels against the One who gave us everything. (Isaiah 53:6) We repeatedly bit the hand that fed us. We rejected His love time after time, but God... Hallelujah! But God had patience and mercy and grace and He kept after us in love until we could see His love in His physical manifestation, Christ Jesus! (Romans 5:8) But God redeemed us! But God transformed us! But God gave us His righteousness in Christ! (2Corinthians 5:21) But God gave us His abiding presence in the Holy Spirit! (Acts 5:32) But God called us His sons and daughters and is preparing a place for us! Praise His name forever and ever! (John 1:12; 14:2) Amen?

And how does this apply to this book of Genesis as it draws to a conclusion? Adam and Eve fell from perfection into the ugliness of sin that would cause so much pain and destruction to mankind, but God meant it for good to save many souls. How could we love Him without free choice? How could we know His mercy and grace unless we experienced it in our own lives? It's personal now. "But God..." what glorious words filled with grace, mercy, patience, hope, but more than anything else, with love! (John 3:16)

Did the brothers of Joseph look back and see the amazing sovereignty of God in their own story? Did they see the many "but God..." interventions? David Guzik writes, "If Joseph's brothers never sell him to the Midianites, then Joseph never goes to Egypt. If Joseph never goes to Egypt, he never is sold to Potiphar. If he is never sold to Potiphar, Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape. If Potiphar's wife never falsely accuses him of rape, then he is never put in prison. If he is never put in prison, he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh. If he never meets the baker and butler of Pharaoh, he never interprets their dreams. If he never interprets their dreams, he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream. If he never gets to interpret Pharaoh's dream, he never is made prime minister. If he is never made prime minister, he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region. If he never wisely administrates for the severe famine coming upon the region, then his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine. If his family back in Canaan perishes from the famine, then the Messiah can't come forth from a dead family. If the Messiah can't come forth, then Jesus never came. If Jesus never came, then you are dead in your sins and without hope in this world. We are grateful for God's great and wise plan." Enduring Word Commentary, David Guzik *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!* Romans 11:33 (NIV)

If the brothers could understand the wonder that God had wrought, there was no need to imagine fearful scenarios. God had saved them for a purpose. They were in His hands and need not fear. Joseph repeats that again because that fear was the motivation behind their intended deception. <sup>21a</sup> *So then, don't be afraid.* It such a frequent refrain throughout Scripture that we should really take it to heart. If we can understand the wonder of our own salvation, we need never imagine some fearful scenario. We are in the hands of Almighty God who will see us through whatever He allows in our life for our good. (Jeremiah 29:11)

**Commented [notes17]:** 6 We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6 (NIV)

**Commented [notes18]:** 8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Romans 5:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes19]:** 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Cor 5:21 (NIV)

**Commented [notes20]:** 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." Acts 5:32 (NIV)

**Commented [notes21]:** 12 Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God-- John 1:12 (NIV)

**Commented [notes22]:** 2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. John 14:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes23]:** 16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NIV)

**Commented [notes24]:** 11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Jer 29:11 (NIV)

Joseph finished by saying, "I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. It was just the opposite of what they feared. Not only was he not going to kill or enslave them, he was giving them all a part of his royal pension.

This reminds me so much of our Savior. When we stand before His awesome holy presence, we will be like Isaiah when he saw the Lord, on our faces in fear of judgment. (Isaiah 6:5) For the first time, by the contrast with His holy presence, we'll see clearly how deplorable our sins have been. We'll remind Him that the Father forgave us because of what He did in our place. But instead of a rebuke and words of condemnation, we'll hear words of kindness and reassurance. He has provided for us with His own blood, and He will provide for us forever in His glory. (Matthew 25:23) What a picture of Jesus we've seen in the life of Joseph!

We then skip forward to the last days of Joseph. He lived to see his great-great-grandchildren, and adopted the sons of his grandson Makir as his own, just as his father had adopted his sons. He, too, asked to be buried in the Promised Land, not presently but when the LORD came to their aid. The writer of Hebrews tells us this was a declaration of faith. (Hebrews 11:22) His unburied coffin was a constant reminder to the descendants of Israel that they were destined to return by the word of the LORD. Joseph was never assimilated by Egypt. He stayed separated in his heart even though he spent 93 years there. The vast majority of his life he was in Egypt but never of Egypt. What an example for us who are in the world but not of this world! (John 17:14)

The book of beginnings ends with the Israelites looking forward to the day God would come to their aid and fulfill His promises to them. Those promises include a Messiah that would crush the head of the Serpent. They include a blessing for the whole world to come through the line of Judah. They include abundance in a Kingdom where Messiah reigns supreme and every knee bows to the Lord of all goodness and righteousness. (Philippians 2:10)

Would you take home the power of those words, "But God..."? Remember all the grace, mercy, hope and love that follow those introductory words. You will experience evil in this world, but God... You will sow to the flesh, but God... You will come face to face with the harsh reality of living in a fallen world, but God... Remember, that He is sovereign over all and that all things work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purposes. Romans 8:28

Remember that we, like Jacob and Joseph, will go the way of all flesh. If the LORD delays His return, we will age and die like them. Let your loved ones know you don't intend to stay here. You have a destination. There is a place prepared for you, and they can join you there if they know The Way, Jesus. (2Corinthians 5:1) Remind them there is no need to fear. (Psalm 62:8) We will die, but God will be our guide even unto death, (Psalm 48:14) but God has prepared a place for us, but God will transform us into His likeness, (1John 3:2) but God will be our God forever and ever. (1Thessalonians 4:17) Amen!

**Commented [notes25]:** 5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."  
Isaiah 6:5 (NIV)

**Commented [notes26]:** 23 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'  
Matt 25:23 (NIV)

**Commented [notes27]:** 22 By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.  
Heb 11:22 (NIV)

**Commented [notes28]:** 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world.  
John 17:14 (NIV)

**Commented [notes29]:** 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
Phil 2:10 (NIV)

**Commented [notes30]:** 1 Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands.  
2 Cor 5:1 (NIV)

**Commented [notes31]:** 8 Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge. Selah  
Psalms 62:8 (NIV)

**Commented [notes32]:** 14 For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.  
Psalms 48:14 (KJV)

**Commented [notes33]:** 2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.  
1 John 3:2 (NIV)

**Commented [notes34]:** 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.  
1 Thess 4:17 (NIV)