

**SESSION OBJECTIVE: GENESIS 50:1-26**

To learn about the death of Jacob and Joseph.

The End of the Beginning

The original name of the book of *Genesis* is just the first word in the Hebrew (בְּרֵאשִׁית) which means, “In the beginning.” However, the English title *Genesis* is derived from the Greek translation of the original Hebrew text (Gen. 2:4 is likely its source). Both names sufficiently describe the task that the book sets out to accomplish. Genesis seeks to go all the way back to the beginning, when creation and even time began. Moses tells us what event set things in motion: “God created.” The book presents a story woven together like a beautiful tapestry, marking the beginning of mankind, the beginning of the new mankind post-flood, the beginning of God’s covenant family, and the beginning of their subsequent stay in the land of Goshen in Egypt. It develops how Abraham was blessed, and how that blessing continued through his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and how Jacob blesses his twelve sons, setting into motion what will eventually become the twelve tribes of Israel. Exodus and the rest of the Torah will continue to chronicle Moses’ leadership of God’s people, the institution of the law, the Levitical priesthood, and the sacrifices that God will require of them. As Genesis comes to an end, it is only really the end of the beginning.

Jacob’s Funeral Procession

Below is a brief overview of the death of Jacob, and the response of his sons and Egypt.

AN EMOTIONAL OUTBURST

Joseph, “fell on his father’s face and wept over him and kissed him” after Jacob died (Gen. 50:1). The emotional response exceeded even his response upon seeing his father alive after nearly seventeen years

(Gen. 46:29). It is also interesting that while “falling on his face” and “weeping over him and kissing him” are not unique practices to demonstrate sincere devotion, this is the only occurrence in the Old Testament of it happening with a dead person. This moment also fulfills what God said to Jacob in Genesis 46:4: “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes.”

EMBALMING?

Another unique feature is that of the practice of embalming. Joseph orders his physicians (lit. *healers*) to “embalm his father” (Gen. 50:2). Only here and in Genesis 50:26 when Joseph himself is embalmed is this term employed in all of the Old Testament. The process, we are told, takes forty days, and there is a seventy-day time of mourning, which probably included the aforementioned forty days. The number of days in total corresponded to the number of family members that came with Jacob into Egypt to begin with (Gen. 46:27; Ex. 1:5). That the Egyptians embalmed both of them speaks of the prestige they held in the eyes of the Egyptian people, as it was a practice typically only relegated to the royal and wealthy. The Jews did not practice embalming, which is why we don’t see this term used after this. The Jewish days of mourning varied between seven days (Gen. 50:10; 1 Sam. 31:13) to thirty days (Deut. 34:8; Num. 20:29).

A LARGE PARTY

Joseph then appeals to Pharaoh to bring Jacob’s body back to the field at Machpelah, and Pharaoh not only agrees, but sends a very large, royal entourage to accompany Joseph and his brothers (Gen. 50:9). In fact, the company was so large that the Canaanites renamed the threshing floor in Atad, “Abel-mizraim,” meaning, “the mourning of Egypt” (Gen. 50:11).

Reconciliation

After the death and burial of Jacob, Joseph’s brothers immediately begin to worry that, “Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him” (Gen. 50:15). The brothers seemingly believed that Jacob’s presence was preventing Joseph from acting harshly towards them, as if he held some sort of secret, deep-seated grudge. Now with Jacob gone, Joseph was free to get revenge, or so they thought. They sent a message to him, afraid to come before him in person, explaining not only their father’s wish for forgiveness between them, but also their own wish to be forgiven of their transgressions (Gen. 50:16-17). After the message had been sent, they came and fell before Joseph and cried, “we are your servants” (Gen. 50:18). Joseph’s response is first to calm them by reminding them that he is not God and therefore does not have the power or authority to enact exacting revenge (Lev. 19:18; Deut. 32:35).

This really presents the theology of the Joseph narrative quite clearly, and it demonstrates the power of faithful obedience to the Lord. Joseph did not know how his life was going to play out. He did not understand what his brothers would do with him, nor what his fate would be in captivity in Egypt. What he did understand is his place before a Holy and Sovereign God. Joseph’s faithful obedience to God prevented his heart from growing hard towards those who perpetrated harm against him. While the brothers are the focus here, it is also telling that after he rose to power, he did not seek justice against Potiphar and his wife. After all, he was wrongfully imprisoned for many years. It is difficult to imagine this kind of mercy, unless you also recognize that God is the ultimate author of history. As bond-servants of Him, we can mourn loss and even be frustrated with difficult circumstances, and simultaneously trust that He intends good for His people even in the midst of those difficult circumstances. This is clarified in his words in verse 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.” In other words, God’s kind intentions towards Egypt were carried out through the difficulty Joseph experienced, and it was his steadfast commitment that allowed him to participate with God’s divine plan.

An important note should be made here. True forgiveness and reconciliation are only possible through faith in a forgiving and Sovereign God. If I believe that God can and will use the difficulty I experience to accomplish His Divine purposes, then I am free to forgive those who harm me, knowing that God used their evil intentions to accomplish His good. This is an incredibly difficult place to come to, but one that is rewarding beyond measure. Apart from being able to participate in the will of God, it frees me from resentment, bitterness, and hatred for those around me. Joseph is not only willing to forgive, but provide for: “So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.’ Thus he comforted and spoke kindly to them” (Gen. 50:21).

Joseph’s Death

After the close of the narrative between Joseph and his brothers, we are told that Joseph, “lived 110 years,” and that, “Joseph saw Ephraim’s children of the third generation” (Gen. 50:22-23a). Additionally, we learn that, “The children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were counted as Joseph’s own” (Gen. 50:23b). Joseph’s longevity of life indicates how blessed he was. His age also offers an alternative understanding of Jacob’s discussion of his own age to Pharaoh: “The days of the years of my sojourning are 130 years. Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning” (Gen. 47:9). Jacob’s words echo a sort of sad reckoning of the shortness of his life in comparison to his father and grandfather, and seems to indicate that he wasn’t worthy of such age. Yet, Joseph’s unimpeachable character would have certainly earned him a longer life than any of them, and yet he dies younger than all of them. Why is this? Consider the scope of Genesis, and the age ranges of individuals through each generation. Adam lived to be 930 years old (Gen. 5:5), Noah lived to be 950 years old (Gen. 9:29), but after the flood the life expectancy went down dramatically. The descendants of Shem show a sharp decrease: Shem lived 600 years (Gen. 11:10-11), Arpachshad lived 438 years (Gen. 11:12-13), Shelah lived 433 years (Gen. 11:14-15). Once we get to Peleg, Reu, and Serug, we only see them live into the 200’s, and Nahor and Terah only in the 100’s. The point is that throughout the duration of Genesis, the age has progressively gotten shorter. There are varying reasons for why this occurred, but either way, perhaps Jacob’s shorter life had less to do with his “worth” and more to do with the nature of how humanity was progressing.

Joseph dies, and is embalmed like his father (Gen. 50:26). Before dying, he tells his brothers, “Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, “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” (Gen. 50:24). This feels similar to Jacob’s words to Joseph (Gen. 48:3-4), but with one major difference: there was no theophany! God never appears to Joseph to tell him any of this! This is, one of the easiest details to pass over, but so important. Joseph is confident in the character of God based on his own walk with Him, and trusted that God spoke truly to his father Jacob, and so he felt comfortable speaking so surely of God’s aid to his descendants. It demonstrates a profound trust in God, something he demonstrated his entire life.

Study Questions

Day One

1. Read Genesis 50:1-3. What is Joseph’s response to Jacob’s death? What does he have his physicians do? How long does it take? How long do they mourn for him?

2. Read Genesis 50:4-5. After what does Joseph speak to Pharaoh? What does he ask him?

Day Two

1. Read Genesis 50:6-10. What is Pharaoh's response to Joseph? Who all goes with Joseph to bury Jacob? Who does not go with Joseph to bury Jacob?

2. Read Genesis 50:11-14. What was the response of the Canaanites upon seeing the mourning party for Jacob? What do they rename the threshing floor of Atad? What does the name mean?

Day Three

1. Read Genesis 50:15-17. What do the brothers of Joseph worry about after the death of Jacob? What message do they send to Joseph?

2. Read Genesis 50:18-21. How did the brothers approach Joseph? What is Joseph's response?

Day Four

1. Read Genesis 50:22-23. How long did Joseph live for? Where did he live for the remainder of his days? Which generation of Ephraim did Joseph live to see? What about Manasseh's offspring?

2. Read Genesis 50:24-26. What does Joseph say to his brothers before dying? What does he make them swear by? Where is he buried?

Week 40 Discussion: Reconciliation

The final drama between Joseph and his brothers is settled upon the death of their father Jacob. The brothers fear that Joseph has secretly been harboring resentment and will desire revenge when Jacob dies, and Joseph reconciles with them fully. Not only does he reconcile with them, but he blesses them by providing for them and their families. All of this is possible because of Joseph's understanding of God's divine economy at play, working through even some of the most difficult circumstances in his life. Talk as a group about how your faith interacts with your ability to reconcile with people who have knowingly and even purposefully harmed you.

1. Icebreaker: Have you ever had to reconcile with someone that harmed you? What was most difficult about it? What helped you through the process of reconciliation?
2. Has anyone sought to reconcile with you after you did something wrong or hurtful to them? How was that experience?
3. How does an understanding of God's sovereignty impact the way you view difficult circumstances in your life?
4. Is it possible to fully reconcile with people without faith in Christ? Why or why not?
5. How does reconciliation paint a picture of the Gospel to outsiders?
6. Why is reconciliation so difficult? What does the flesh have to say about reconciliation?

Takeaways:

1. Jacob's death was mourned and his burial was viewed by a great number of individuals.
2. Joseph reconciled with his brothers, and then died and was embalmed and buried in Egypt.

PRAYER REQUESTS: