

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.
Oakleigh, Vic, 3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 38

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

Chapter 50

INTRODUCTION

The death of Jacob closes the history of the Patriarchs, Abraham and Isaac. The closing chapter of Genesis speaks of death. In the beginning, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and man who are all descendants of the primeval couple are punished with death. But at the very outset, God revealed His love and compassion for man. He had intimated that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent (3:15). This is a veiled prediction of the coming of the conqueror that would render a triumphant blow upon the "serpent." This seed of the woman had been narrowed at first to a family Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Of the twelve sons of Jacob, Judah would eventually rule over Israel.¹ There would emerge from Judah one who is called *Shiloh*, "the Rest-bringer," who would gather all the peoples of the earth unto

him.² God's plan and purpose of redeeming and reconciling the nation Israel and the other nations to Himself would be progressively unveiled. God had shown in Genesis that He remembers His covenant promises made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and He would keep them. Hence, Jacob and Joseph exercised their faith in God that He would bring them all out of Egypt back to the Promised Land.

A major theme in Genesis 50 is death – the death of Jacob and Joseph. The inevitability of death upon all man is never played down in Scripture. It is a reality which man will do well to accept and learn of. Our attitude towards death and especially the death of one, whom we loved very much, will affect our well-being for worse or for good. Another theme is God's providential dealings with His chosen people. It is reiterated here in the words of Joseph to his brothers, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (v.20). It illustrates perfectly Paul's words to the Romans, which is so familiar with many of us, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28). A further interesting point is that the book ends with a question posed by Joseph, "Am I in the place of God?" Joseph denied all thoughts on his part to be God or like God. By comparison, in the opening chapters of the book man aspired and many still aspire, to be like God (3:5, 6).

¹ In Revelation 5:5, John was alluding to Genesis 49:8-11. He was referring to the Lord Jesus Christ.

² Leupold, pp. 1178-1183. Leupold discusses the meaning of "Shiloh."

OUTLINE

A. Joseph Instructed His Physicians to Embalm Jacob's Body in Preparation for Burial (50:1-3).

1. Joseph mourned over the death of his father (v.1).
2. Joseph commanded his physicians to embalm his father (v.2).
3. The embalming took forty days during which the Egyptians mourned over Jacob too (v.3).

B. Joseph Asked Leave from Pharaoh to Bury His Father in Canaan (50:4-6).

1. Joseph went through members of Pharaoh's household to obtain permission to bury Jacob (vv.4-5).
2. Pharaoh granted Joseph permission to bury his father (v.6).

C. Joseph Led the Burial Procession of Jacob to The Land of Canaan (50:7-11).

1. Joseph led the burial procession and was joined by the dignitaries of Egypt (v.7).
2. All the households of Jacob and his sons, except the little children and livestock, attended the burial (vv. 8-9).
3. The loud lamentation of the mourners aroused the attention of the Canaanites (vv.10-11).

D. The Sons of Jacob Buried Him According to His Wish (50:12-14).

1. The sons of Jacob did as their father had commanded them (v. 12).
2. They buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which Abraham bought for a burying place (v. 13).
3. Joseph and all of them returned to Egypt (v.14).

E. Joseph Reassured His Brothers of His Continued Kindness and God's Purpose (50:15-21).

1. Joseph's brothers feared that Joseph would take his revenge on them now that their father was dead (v.15).
2. The brothers, fearing that Joseph might take his revenge on them, conveyed to him their late father's wish that they should say to Joseph to forgive their sin against them (vv. 16-18).
3. Joseph reassured them that though they had meant harm, God meant it for good and promised to provide for them (vv.19-21).

F. Joseph, Having Lived A Hundred and Ten Years, Died Believing that God Would Fulfill His Promise to Bring them Back to Canaan (50:22-26).

1. Joseph lived to enjoy his children to the third generation (vv.22-23).
2. Joseph expressed his faith that God would bring them out of

Egypt to the Promised Land (v.24).

3. Joseph made his brothers promise to bury his bones in his native land (v.25).
4. Joseph died at the age of one hundred and ten years and his body was embalmed and encoffined in Egypt (v.26).

COMMENTARY

Weeping Over the Death of a Loved One

Joseph fell upon his father's face and wept upon him and kissed him (v.1). How Joseph loved his father. He showed uncontrollably his feelings for his father. He would have prayed and wished that his father could live for another seventeen years in Egypt to compensate for the loss of those years of separation from him. But the day will come when the frail outward shell of our body can no longer house the inward man. Separation of body and soul (or spirit) is inevitable. Death is the outcome.

Man's attitudes towards death can be reduced to the following: (1) a death-accepting attitude; (2) a death-defying attitude; and (3) a death-denying attitude.³ Many just submissively accept the reality of death. Others would defy death by shouting that they are not afraid to die – a die-die-so-what kind of attitude. Yet there are others who would try not to think or speak about it or to

lessen the shock of death by various euphemistic expressions.

But what should be the Christian attitude towards death? We can learn from Joseph's attitude. Weeping over the death of someone we love is a natural part of our being. This weeping and grieving should not prolong more than necessary. Joseph immediately took control of himself and instructed the preparation of Jacob's body for burial. And after the burial, Joseph "returned into Egypt". (v.14) He returned to Egypt not to continue to mourn and grieve over the death of his father. Life had to go on and that was what Joseph did. This Christian attitude is best expressed by Paul. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul comforted them with the truth of the resurrection of Christ and of all Christians. In his masterful exposition on the resurrection and the question of death, Paul exclaimed at the end of his treatise (1 Corinthians 15:54, 56),

"Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?"

The Christian attitude is the acceptance of death as an inescapable reality for the moment while we are on earth. But there is a defying of death in a way because we have hope in Christ, who rose from the dead, and one day Christians too would rise from the dead as promised by God.⁴

³ Boice, p.319.

⁴1 Corinthians 15:51 Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be

Treating the Body of our Loved Ones with Due Respect

Joseph never acted presumptuously. He asked Pharaoh for permission to leave Egypt to go to Canaan to bury his father. Pharaoh was very kind and permitted him to do so (v.6). The interesting part is that Joseph made the request through an intermediary of “the house of Pharaoh” (v. 4). The custom then was that it was not proper for Joseph who was in bereavement to approach Pharaoh when his late father had not been interred.⁵

In accordance with Egyptian custom Jacob’s body was prepared for burial as instructed by Joseph.⁶ It was the proper thing to do. It was not cremated or burned – to cremate and burn the body of a loved one is to treat it like an animal or a criminal. Jacob’s body was embalmed which included a proper washing of the body. In fulfilling the wish of his father, Joseph led his brothers in a procession to take the body to be buried in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan. All the men went, but the women and children remained in Egypt. Jacob was buried in great honour. The entire cortege was a great one. Joseph led in the procession. He was followed by Pharaoh’s court officials. Following behind were the men folks of his family, and then all the dignitaries of Egypt. At the rear of the cortege was a military

contingent of chariots and horsemen. Nearing the burial site, they stopped at a place where a public mourning ceremony was held. It lasted for a week (v.10). Then only Joseph and his brothers carried the body to the cave of Machpelah where it was interred (v.13). While we may not follow all that was done by Joseph, the important lesson is that the preparation for burial of our departed loved ones should be carried out in a proper and respectful manner.

Knowing God Makes It Easier to Forgive Others

Having buried his father, Joseph and all his family members returned to Egypt. Joseph carried on his work. His brothers were now afraid that with the death of their father, Joseph might take revenge on them for the evil deed, which they had done to him. They still had not got over their guilty conscience. This teaches us never to sin against God or our spouses, our brothers and sisters, or others. It is a terrible struggle to deal with the guilty conscience in our mind and heart, even though we are comforted by the fact that all have been forgiven. We tend to forget this fact and dwell on the matter and feel fearful and self-condemning.

Joseph’s brothers were so afraid that they sent a messenger to speak to Joseph on their behalf. Their appeal for mercy and forgiveness was based on Joseph’s deep affection and love for his father. They addressed Jacob before Joseph as “thy father” (v. 16). They did appeal to him based on the fact that they were his brothers. They told him that before Jacob died, their father had told them to tell Joseph to forgive them for their sin against him. And when they knew that Joseph wept, they went to

changed. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality.

⁵ Such as the case with Mordecai. When learned of Haman who conspired to kill all the Jews (Esther 4:2), he grieved in sackcloth and ashes. He could not enter the King’s Gate, i.e. the palace door. He was allowed only to come as far as the King’s Gate.

⁶ Jewish custom is to bury the dead within 24 hours.

him themselves, bowed themselves to the ground and offered to be his slaves (v.18). This is very sad indeed.

But Joseph's response is marvellous and magnanimous. Joseph's opening words to them was "Fear not, for am I in the place of God?" (v.19). Joseph's theology was that God is the Avenger, the Judge. Vengeance belongs to God, not him.⁷ To take revenge or vengeance against another who has done evil towards another is to play God. It is better to find out what is the purpose and will of God in such situations, and to forgive and pray for the evil doer. This was precisely what Joseph did. He said to them that they "thought evil" against him, but God "meant it for good" (v.20). Any one who knows God and His purpose will find it easier to forgive others who had wronged him. Joseph with much kindness went on to assure them that he would provide for them and their children.

A Fulfilling and Fruitful Life

It is the wish of everyone to spend a fulfilling and fruitful life all the days of our life on earth. Minus our childhood days, the years we spend on earth is further shortened. Joseph, it seems, did not outlive his brothers (v.24). He died at the age of 110. This compared with

his forefathers was short.⁸ But he lived to see his great grand-children (v.23). Is this not the promise of God that those who honour their father and their mother live longer?⁹

However, the measure of one's life on earth is not evaluated on the basis of the number of years. It is on the quality of life in the years one lives on earth. Our Lord Jesus Christ died at the age of about 34 years. His ministerial life was only about 3 years! What an impact He made in the world and in the lives of people! That is how we should live. This truth is both comforting and encouraging. If one is already old, it is still not too late to offer one's life to serve the Lord Jesus Christ. And if one is young, don't squander the time, talent and toil, but invest them in the Lord's work.

Joseph Died in Faith

Before his death, Joseph declared to the children of Israel that "God will surely visit" and bring them back to the land which He promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (v.24). He made them swear that when they leave Egypt, they were to take his bones with them back to Canaan. The bones of Joseph were buried by the children of Israel in

⁷Deuteronomy 32:35 To me *belongeth* vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in *due* time: for the day of their calamity *is* at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

Romans 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance** *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Leviticus 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I *am* the LORD.

⁸ Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:6,7); Isaac, 180 (35:28, 29); Jacob, 147 (47:28, 29).

⁹ Exodus 20:12 Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Deuteronomy 5:16 Honour thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.

Shechem, in a plot of land, which Jacob bought from the Shechemites.¹⁰

Joseph had done a lot for his people. Yet the divine inspired writer of Hebrew singled out his faith in God to be praised (Hebrews 11:22),

By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.

Joseph's faith indeed was strong and steadfast. It was not easy for him. His faith in God was severely tested. Moreover, he did not have the spiritual advantage, which even his brothers had. They had their father to share with them how God had provided, preserved, and prospered them. Joseph was living in a spiritual vacuum, or worse, the spiritual environment he was in was adverse to his religious heritage. But, as we have seen, Joseph's faith in God did not waver under the most trying circumstances. He did not capitulate. When he was poor, down and out, he did not blame nor blaspheme the name of God. When he became rich and powerful, and surrounded by opulence and luxury, he did not forget God. He remained faithful to God to the end. In fact, all these circumstances made his faith stronger. He saw and understood God's purpose and will in his life! AMEN

¹⁰ Joshua 24:32 And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph.

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DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION

QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Genesis 50:1-6; Deuteronomy 34:7-8; John 11:32-36.

Tuesday: Genesis 50:7-13; 2 Samuel 21:12-14; Jeremiah 22:18-19.

Wednesday: Genesis 50:14-21; John 8:3-11; Luke 6:27-36.

Thursday: Genesis 50:22-26; Exodus 13:17-19; Joshua 24:29-32.

Friday: Hebrews 11:8-22; Romans 1:17; 10:17; Joshua 6:1-8.

Discussion Questions

1. How do we know that Joseph loved and respected his father?

2. What temptation did Joseph face in connection to the death of his father?

3. Should Christians pay respect to the body of someone who has died?

4. What does Joseph mean when he said "am I in the place of God"?

5. The divine record reports that Joseph wept. Why did he weep?

6. How did Joseph show his brothers that he truly forgave them?

7. Why do you think Joseph made his brother swear to him to carry his bones and bury them in his native land, instead of just ordering them like his father did to him?

8. What truth(s) about God can we discover in Genesis 50?

9. What is the secret in Joseph's life that had determined his thoughts and actions?

10. What have you learned about God that you want to act on?
