

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: [truthfortoday@aol.com](mailto:truthfortoday@aol.com)

**Broadcast Date:** 8 February 2004

**No.** T0304

**Speaker:** Mr. David Anderson

## Lessons from the life of Joseph: Last Days – Genesis 50

Today's talk completes the *Truth for Today* series "Lessons from the life of Joseph" and it's about the final part of his life. The story is found in the last chapter of Genesis, chapter 50, and it's interesting to notice that it covers about 53 years of the 110 years that he lived.

- He was 3 years old when Jacob returned from Padan Aram to Canaan, 33:18.
- He was 16 years old when his mother, Rachel, died giving birth to his full-brother, Benjamin, 35:16-20.
- He was only 17 years old when he was "sent to serve" and sold as a slave, 37:2.
- He was 30 years old when he stood before Pharaoh, 41:46. That means he was a young man in his twenties when he was "always faithful" to God throughout the trials of Potiphar's house and the prison.
- He was in his early thirties when he proved that "God is for us".
- He was 39 years old when he was reunited with his brothers, 45:1-9, and exemplified the "forgiving one another" attitude.
- He was 57 years old when his father Jacob died, 47:28, after 17 years of being "together again".
- He died when he was 110 years old, 50:26.

Therefore the majority of the Genesis account about Joseph's life spans the 40 years period which ended with the crisis of Jacob's death.

There's nothing like the issues of death to bring into focus the realities and purposes of life! Genesis 50 concentrates on these aspects of Joseph's last days. Let's look at them in three ways.

1. Jacob's funeral, verses 1-14.
2. Joseph's forgiveness, verses 15-21.
3. Joseph's faith, verses 22-26.

### Part 1. Jacob's funeral.

The journey of the whole family of Israel from Canaan to Egypt, and their residence there, was the final episode of Jacob's history. During it he had been resigned to lose Benjamin: "If I am bereaved, I am bereaved!" 43:14. When he discovered that Joseph was still alive, he determined to see him and so fulfil his life. "Then Israel said, "It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die", 45:28. However the reunion gave him a new lease of life. "So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly. And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years", 47:27-28.

Jacob knew that he could always rely upon Joseph. He therefore charged him with his funeral arrangements, telling him that his remains were to be taken back to the family grave in Canaan. "When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him..." "Please do not bury me in Egypt, but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said", 47:29-30. Jacob realised that the promises concerning Canaan that God gave to Abraham in 12:7 and again in 13:15-17 would be granted to his family. Therefore in 49:28-33 he repeats his requirements for his burial to all his sons after he had prophesied about them and pronounced his blessings upon them. "Then he charged them..." "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth", 49:29-32.

Jacob's faith in God gave him confidence that he would live beyond death and was expressed in his words "I am to be gathered to my people". By faith Christians now know that death for them is "to depart and be with Christ", Philippians 1:23.

Chapter 50 opens with the moving scene of Joseph's reaction to his father's death. "Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him", verse 1. He had his father's body embalmed so that it could be transported back to Canaan in accordance with Jacob's directives.

However, the whole affair was most remarkable! Jacob was given a full state Egyptian funeral, no doubt because of Joseph's high rank and position. The Egyptians mourned for him seventy days – almost as long as they would have done for Pharaoh himself. Then they provided the means for the family of Israel to return to Canaan to bury their father. The caravan, replete with high-ranking officials and a military escort, took the route which skirted the Red Sea, crossed the Sinai desert, went south round the Dead Sea area, and passed north up the eastern side of the river Jordan to the threshing floor of Atad. Here there was a week-long lying in state, with "a great and very solemn lamentation". It was so dramatic that when the Canaanites saw the Egyptians acting in this manner they renamed the place Abel Mizraim, which means the mourning or the meadow of Egypt!

The sons of Israel then took their father over Jordan and privately buried him following the practices of their forefathers, who themselves had been men of faith. "So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. For his sons carried him...and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah", 50:12-13. This part of the funeral was conducted in a manner that is fitting for a saint of God. And such practices continue in today's world for those who die in faith, in the sure and certain hope of the resurrection of those who "sleep through Jesus" - because He died and rose again, see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

## Part 2. Joseph's forgiveness

Joseph's brothers were naturally concerned about Joseph's attitude towards them after their father's death. They recognised that they had done wrong in putting him in the pit and selling him as a slave. They feared that he would exact retribution. It seems that they had expressed these concerns to Jacob before he died and that he, as the head of the family, had given instruction on the matter. Some Bible expositors suggest that Jacob's involvement may have been a made-up story by Joseph's brothers because they knew that he wouldn't disobey his father. However, the brothers obviously did appreciate the special relationship that had existed between Jacob and Joseph and that it was the key to solving to their problem.

Verses 15-17 describes the action they took: "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.' So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, 'Before your father died he commanded, saying, "Thus you shall say to Joseph, 'I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now please forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.'" "

They didn't realise that Joseph had already completely and fully done so! Neither did they fully appreciate his understanding of the ways that God had taken to preserve their family. Their message caused Joseph to weep - that they should have so misunderstood him after his repeated assurances to them. It's also possible that he already knew from Jacob himself that such a confession had been urged upon them and was moved to tears by the emotion of the occasion.

Joseph's weeping is mentioned several times in Genesis:

1. He **wept** when his brothers' consciences were awakened as they debated the strange things which were happening to them during their first visit to Egypt, 42:24.
2. He couldn't contain himself when Benjamin was brought to him at their second visit to Egypt. "Then he asked them about their well-being, and said, "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" And they answered, "Your servant our father is in good health; he is still alive"...Then he lifted his eyes and saw his brother Benjamin, his mother's son, and said, "Is this your younger brother of whom you spoke to me?" And he said, "God be gracious to you, my son." Now his heart yearned for his brother; so Joseph made haste and sought somewhere to **weep**. And he went into his chamber and **wept** there", 43:27-30.
3. At the subsequent detention of Benjamin, Reuben's appeal to him about "the old man" and "the lad" so stirred his heart that he couldn't restrain himself any longer. He "**wept** aloud" as he made himself known to his brethren, so loud that all around heard it and it became a special item of news throughout Egypt. "Then he fell on his brother Benjamin's neck and **wept**, and Benjamin **wept** on his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brothers and **wept** over them, and after that his brothers talked with him", 45:14-15.
4. He **wept** again when he was reunited with his father. "...Joseph...went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; and he presented himself to him, and fell on his neck and **wept** on his neck a good while", 46:29.
5. He **wept** when his father died.
6. And he **wept** in this incident where his brothers doubted the sincerity of his forgiveness.

These tears were much more than the understandable natural reactions he had to emotive situations. They show Joseph's concern and his tender heart of love for those he knew were God's chosen people. His weeping shows, as do so many other of his characteristics, those features of the Lord Jesus Christ which reveal to us the heart of God. For example Christ wept over the stiff-necked city of Jerusalem, and he cried at the tomb of Lazarus.

But the beautiful picture of the Lord Jesus Christ shown by Joseph in this encounter with his brothers is that of His forgiveness. The Lord Jesus told the extent of His forgiveness in that lovely story of the two debtors, who, "when they had nothing to pay, [the creditor] freely forgave them both", Luke 7:40-50. There is forgiveness of sins through the Lord Jesus, "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things" [Acts 13:38-39]. To any listener who would in any way doubt this, the Lord Jesus tenderly says, in the words of Joseph, "Do not be afraid", Genesis 50:19. God wants us to be assured that our salvation will never be withdrawn from us once we have believed in the Lord Jesus Christ. Many people think that they must keep on working to save themselves, and some even think that they might be lost after all. But the Bible says that we've been put right with God through faith and we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, Romans 5:1.

Joseph's reply to his brothers shows that God even uses the wrath of man to praise Him [Psalm 76:10]. "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive" 50:20. "[Men] meant evil...but God meant...good" is the Christian gospel message of the cross!

Joseph comforted his brothers and promised to continue to care for them. His final gracious words were: "Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" 50:21. We can hear through these words of Joseph the comforting words of the Saviour as He says to us: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid", John 14:27. The Lord Jesus loves, saves and keeps everyone of His own throughout life and unto the end of everything!

### Part 3. Joseph's faith

Genesis 50 gives few details of the later part of Joseph's life. However, the epistle to the Hebrews selects the incident preceding his death in this chapter to highlight his faith. "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones", Hebrews 11:22.

Joseph lived for one hundred and ten years. He and all of the family of Israel remained in Egypt. "...Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees", 50:23. But Joseph never forgot that promise made to Abraham some 300 years earlier in 13:12-18 concerning their inheritance, the land of Canaan. Nor the chilling vision, the horror and great darkness, which preceded the covenant God made with Abraham when he lived in, but didn't possess, Canaan. "Then [God] said to Abram: "Know certainly that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, and will serve them, and they will afflict them four hundred years. And also the nation whom they serve I will judge; afterward they shall come out with great possessions...you shall be buried...But in the fourth generation they shall return here...On the same day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying: 'To your descendants I have given this land'" 15:13-18. This promise was repeated first to Isaac, 26:2-6 and then to Jacob, 35:9-15. So real were these promises to Joseph that he calls Canaan "the land of the Hebrews" in 40:15. Joseph saw his part in the fulfilment of these promises when he was sent ahead of the family into Egypt, 45:4-11. He then lived by faith, content to wait for God to bring about the remainder in His own time.

But he was anxious that this hope shouldn't be lost to successive generations of Israelites. By faith he acted just prior to his death. "And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt", 50:24-26. And so his dead body, embalmed in an Egyptian mummy case, remained a testimony to Israel, especially throughout those difficult times of slave labour and bitter bondage under the "new king over Egypt, who didn't know Joseph".

Unlike his father, Joseph didn't receive a state funeral from the Egyptians. Perhaps they had already forgotten that he had saved their country from the disaster of the seven years of famine? Or was it that, although Joseph lived in Egypt, his heart was really in Canaan, "the land of the Hebrews"? Although he had been the Prime Minister, he realised that this was only so that his people could be preserved, Psalm 105:16-24. We might say that his living faith made him to be a pilgrim in a strange land.

Joseph's hope was fulfilled when the time of deliverance arrived, and God led them out, "...Moses took the bones of Joseph with him," Exodus 13:19. Almost the very last words in the book of Joshua tell of Joseph's final resting place: "The bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel had brought up out of Egypt, they buried at Shechem, in the plot of

ground which Jacob had bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for one hundred pieces of silver, and which had become an inheritance of the children of Joseph”, Joshua 24:32. The significance of this event is captured by Stephen in Acts 7:14-17 - it was the time when the land had been possessed, and the realisation of the promise made by God to Abraham!

But was Joseph’s hope only about his people inheriting Canaan? It appears that the patriarchs had their hope on heaven “for [Abraham] waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God...These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them”, Hebrews 11:10, 13-16. Jacob would have explained these things to his favourite son.

We need the same kind of faith and hope in God today, and the accompanying attitude of being strangers and pilgrims in this world, whatever our status in it. The Lord Jesus said He’s gone to prepare a place for us in His Father’s house and that He’ll come again to receive us to that place in heaven. We find our place in the eternal purposes of God, along with those faithful people of old “of whom the world was not worthy...all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us”, Hebrews 11:38-40.

Let’s pray. Lord Jesus, help us to realise Your great heart of love for us and that Your grace is always towards us. Help us to see by faith our eternal destiny with You in Your heavenly home. Amen.

---

**Please Note:**

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.