

# BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger ..." John 6:35

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## GENESIS 50

### CHAPTER 50 – The Death and Burial of Jacob

The final chapter of Genesis begins with Joseph weeping over his beloved father and kissing him, before commanding his servants to embalm him. Embalming was an Egyptian practice, strictly forbidden under Torah Law, as God told Adam, for you are dust and to dust shall you return. In Jacob's case, there was a long delay between death and burial, so embalming would have preserved the body on the long journey to its resting place in the land of Canaan. However, there may also be spiritual significance in the preservation of the body of 'Israel' and its transportation to the land of Canaan. Was Israel and what he represents in effect, preserved and buried as a living seed in the Promised Land, along with his forefathers?

The period of embalming took 40 days, and the Egyptians mourned (wept) for him 70 days. Again, we see familiar, significant numbers here.

*So Joseph went up to bury his father. With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. As well as all the household of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's household. Only their children, their flocks, and their herds were left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen. It was a very great company. When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and grievous lamentation, and he made a mourning for his father seven days. When the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning on the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians." Therefore the place was named Abel-mizraim;<sup>1</sup> it is beyond the Jordan.*

These verses hold some interesting details:

- "Went up" – mentioned twice in first two sentences – also regularly indicates spiritual ascension.
- "All" – the servants of Pharaoh/elders /household of Joseph – went up with him. Think about this—it seems that Pharaoh himself didn't go, but all his servants and all the elders of his house and of Egypt left their land to join this mourning for Joseph's father.
- The Hebrew word *kabed* is used three times in verses 9-11. The word signifies something very imposing, a great physical weight or quantity and refers here to the company, the lamentation and the mourning. Significantly, a related word is *kabod*, which is translated *glory*.
- *Beyond the Jordan* is mentioned twice. We might consider the significance of the crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land.
- *The threshing floor of Atad* is also mentioned twice – The Hebrew word *Atad* means *thorn*, from 'an unused root probably meaning to pierce or make fast.'

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<sup>1</sup> *Abel-mizraim* means 'meadow of Egypt'.

## The Threshing Floor of Atad

The first mention of a threshing floor is found here in Genesis 50:10-11—"the threshing floor of Atad". Why mourn for 'Israel' at a "threshing floor"?

Threshing in Biblical times was the harvest-time activity by which the grain was removed from the husk. But its meaning goes beyond merely "the place where grain was threshed". There are many scriptures relating to a *threshing floor* which may help us to understand its biblical significance:

- Each of the three Jewish pilgrim festivals is related to harvest.
- It is a place of blessing and restitution (Numbers 18:30; Joel 2:24).
- A day of it is a place of judgment (Mt. 3:11-12; Micah 4:11-13)
- It is a place of worship<sup>2</sup>—David purchased a threshing floor as the site for the Temple. (2 Chronicles 3:1.
- It is symbolic of the relationship between the Bride and the Bridegroom. Ruth washes and anoints herself and puts on her best clothes and lay at the feet of Boaz at the threshing floor. (Ruth 3:6-14). Boaz foreshadows Christ (our kinsman redeemer), and Ruth, the Bride of Christ.

At this place, the Canaanites witness the *grievous mourning* of the Egyptians. The Canaanites speak of the flesh side of man. Canaanites were the descendants of Canaan who was a son of Ham, and a grandson of Noah (see Noah study).

### Q. What can you construe from these details?

Where else in the Bible do we read of great mourning?

Zech. 12:10 *"I will pour out on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Spirit of grace and of supplication, so that **they will look on Me whom they have pierced; and they will mourn for Him**, as one mourns for an only son, and they will weep bitterly over Him like the bitter weeping over a firstborn."*

Matthew 24:30-31 *"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky and **all the nations of the earth will mourn**. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with **a loud trumpet call**, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."*

Considering the prophetic nature of Genesis, and the Messianic and end-time focus of the studies concerning Joseph<sup>3</sup> (which take up a huge 13 chapters), it appears that we could be looking at the unfolding of end-time events – possibly the final Feasts of Israel: Rosh Hashanah<sup>4</sup>, the Feast of Trumpets, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement – also known as the High Holy Days or the Days of Awe (a 10-day period). The focus of these days is repentance and serious introspection, a time to consider the sins of the previous year and repent before Yom Kippur—the most solemn day of the Jewish year. The Biblical Feasts of Israel spell out the full redemption plan of God<sup>5</sup>, so we might expect to see them foreshadowed in Genesis, especially in these last chapters concerning Joseph and his brothers.

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<sup>2</sup> Read full article here: [http://www.preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/walker-don\\_pp\\_04.html](http://www.preteristarchive.com/PartialPreterism/walker-don_pp_04.html)

<sup>3</sup> The last three Torah portions in Genesis are named: "At the end", "And he approached"; "And he lived".

<sup>4</sup> Rosh Hashanah is also the anniversary of the sixth day of Creation, when Adam and Eve were created. See <https://blog.israelbiblicalstudies.com/jewish-studies/shanah-tova/>

<sup>5</sup> Jesus was crucified on Passover, rose on Feast of Firstfruits; Holy Spirit was poured out on Shavuot; the final 3 Feasts are yet to be fulfilled.

## The Brothers' Fear and Joseph's Reassurance

v.15 *When Joseph's brothers realized that their father was dead, they thought, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us and will repay us for all the harm we caused him."*

As long as their father was alive they viewed him as their protector against Joseph's vengeance, now that he is gone, their guilt and fear returns, so they sent a message to Joseph, relating a command that supposedly came from their father: *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.*" And Joseph wept when they spoke to him.

### Q. Why does this plea for forgiveness cause Joseph to weep?

This is the first time the word *forgive* appears in the Torah. This underlines the vital importance of grace and forgiveness. Guilt remained in them until they asked for and received Joseph's assurance of forgiveness. *"His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants."* As we close the story of Joseph, we can appreciate that the central theme of the entire narrative is about sin, repentance and forgiveness.

We thought the issue of reconciliation had been fully dealt with when Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Why is it only now that the brothers receive his forgiveness in their own hearts? And how can we relate this to the death and burial of Israel, their father?

### Q. DISCUSS the importance of giving and receiving forgiveness in relation to man and God, and between man and man.

Joseph responds by reiterating God's higher purpose: *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many (a vast number of) people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones."* Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

## The Death of Joseph – 50:22-26

Joseph lived 110 years and saw his great-grandsons before the time of his death drew near. Like his father before him, he remembers the Promised Land and exacts a promise from his family: *Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here."*

Finally, in the very last verse of Genesis, we read the record of Joseph's death: *So Joseph died, being 110 years old. They embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*

**Hebrew insight:** The Hebrew word translated *coffin*, is *aron*. It is the same word given to the Holy Ark of the Covenant, which contained the twin tablets of the Torah – the Word of God.

Joseph had not demanded the immediate transfer of his coffin to Canaan, as his father had done, the fact remains that his spirit dwelt with his children during the difficult hardships which awaited them in Egypt. On this note of moral comfort Genesis comes to an end.<sup>6</sup>

The conclusion of Joseph's story is found in Exodus 13:19, which speaks of the removal of his bones from Egypt, and later in Joshua 24:32, which records the burial of his bones in Shechem.<sup>7</sup> This is

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<sup>6</sup> Munk, *Call of Torah*.

<sup>7</sup> Nowhere does it say that the 'coffin' is buried. It is probably a sarcophagus.

interesting because it means that Joseph's bones must have been carried with them throughout the 40 years in the desert before they entered the Promised Land. The New Testament also makes reference to Joseph: Stephen's speech in Acts 7:9-16, and Hebrews 11:22 which states that Joseph's request to bring his bones out of Egypt was in itself an act of faith.

Genesis begins with Life, and ends with a coffin in Egypt. Joseph's forgiveness and his brothers' repentance changed the story – cleared the slate – and led to Israel becoming a cohesive nation. This then becomes the bridge between Genesis and Exodus.

## THE MAIN THEMES OF GENESIS

We will complete our study of this amazing Book by reflecting on some repetitive themes:

### 1. Two Brothers

From the time of the first sin in the Garden of Eden, we were made aware of the outworking of sin in human nature, and the deep divide that occurred between God and man, man and man, flesh and spirit. This separation was brought into focus by the repetitive theme of two brothers:

“None of the central figures in these dramas is either all good or all bad. The best have their faults; the worst have their virtues.... At key points in the narrative our sympathies are drawn to Ishmael and Esau.... There is nothing predictable or one-dimensional about any of these characters. They are studies in moral complexity. We now understand why. Dividing the world into saints and sinners, the saved and the damned, the children of God and the children of the devil, is the first step down the road to violence in the name of God...”<sup>8</sup>

We also saw that those not chosen to carry forth the righteous seed were not thereby rejected—they were also loved and shown grace. This was brought to a conclusion in the final story of Joseph and his brothers.

In the development of these four narratives, the Torah is making a statement of the most fundamental kind.... If brothers cannot live together in peace, then they cannot form a stable society or a cohesive nation.... When people lack the ability to forgive, they are unable to resolve conflict. The result is division, factionalism, and the fragmentation of a nation into competing groups and sects. That is why Joseph's forgiveness is the bridge between Genesis and Exodus... the message could not be clearer. Those who seek freedom must learn to forgive.<sup>9</sup>

Genesis also contains a powerful argument against seeing yourself as a victim, which we saw when the first humans, Adam and Eve, realized their nakedness. Both saw themselves as victims and sought someone to blame. By the end of Genesis, however, Joseph, who really was a victim, refuses to define himself as such. Not only that, but he provides refuge and abundance for his brothers who had sought his life.

As the various sagas unfolded, we saw a larger story: Can killed his brother Abel; Isaac and Ishmael finally stood together at their father Abraham's grave; Jacob and Esau meet, embrace and go their separate ways; Joseph brings about forgiveness, reconciliation and coexistence. “This is a highly structured literary sequence whose unmistakable message is that *sibling rivalry may be natural, but it is not inevitable*. It can be conquered: by generosity of spirit, active efforts of reconciliation, and the realization... (that) there is no need to want someone else's blessing. We each have our own.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p169.

<sup>9</sup> Jonathan Sacks, *Covenant & Conversation*, p327-7

<sup>10</sup> Sacks, *Not in God's Name*, p171

We can now extrapolate these findings into our current world reality. Where do we see “two brothers” needing reconciliation? Of course, there is more than one answer to this question. We should also see Israel and Yeshua as brothers—both sons of the one Father. (See Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15.) As we have seen, the theme of ‘two an brothers’ calso be extrapolated to refer to the flesh/spirit natures within each and every one of us.

## **2. Famine in the Land & descent into Egypt**

Another common theme has been famine in the Land, followed by descent into Egypt. We saw Abraham going down into Egypt, shortly after responding to God’s call, in Genesis 12; Isaac also experienced a famine in the land and went down to Gerar (after he was told not to go to Egypt); then, of course, it was famine again that drove Jacob’s family to settle in Egypt. Of course, we also know that Joseph and Mary were told to take their child down to Egypt and stay there until the death of Herod: “that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son.” (Mt 2:15).

The journey of the Patriarchs is also our journey. Each of these three themes has relevance for each and every one of us who have been called ‘out of Egypt’ – out of slavery to sin – to follow the God of Israel, to a glorious promised end. Are flesh and spirit fully reconciled in us? Has Christ been ‘formed in us’? (Gal 4:19); Have we come out of ‘Egypt’ – if so, where are we on the journey? Have we crossed the Jordan and taken possession of the Land – our own souls? (1 Peter 1:9).

The stories of the Patriarchs took place against the background of the promise of a destiny in the Promised Land – a land they have had a taste of, but are not yet ready to inherit as their own land. Even when we come to the very end of Torah – the end of Deuteronomy – God’s people have still not entered the Land.

We have read, and will continue to read throughout the Torah, of optimism, pessimism, hope, failure, struggle and victory—but throughout, the LORD leads them on. The last chapter is not yet written. The Messiah, as far as the majority of the Jewish world is concerned, has not yet come. Even for us Christians, the story is not complete until he comes again. Until then, the story continues . . . until God Himself brings it to a glorious end!

## **3. Barren Wombs**

All three matriarchs – Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel – experienced difficulty conceiving because of a *barren womb*. What is Torah trying to communicate through this barrenness? In Gen 30:1 Rachel said to Jacob: “Give me children or else I die.” Paul, speaking of Abraham’s faith, refers to the “deadness of Sarah’s womb” (Rom 4:19). All three matriarchs needed supernatural help to conceive—to bring forth life from a ‘dead womb’. Turning to the NT, we read of another barren womb—Elizabeth— “When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.” We will also be aware that Messiah’s mother, Mary, also conceived through divine intervention. Is the Church also barren? Is she yet to “give birth”?

This subject is far too deep and far-reaching to cover here, but if you wish to pursue your own study, a few verses to consider are: 1 Samuel 1:20; Ps. 113:9; Micah 5:3; Luke 1:13; Romans 8:22; Galatians 4:19; Revelation 12. You might also find this YouTube interesting.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> “Birth Pains for Reformation”, <https://youtu.be/VDx8PP06ybc?t=27>