Free Online Bible Commentary for Genesis 48-50

**Introduction:** Jacob lives 17 more years after moving to Egypt. Joseph provides for Jacob and his family during the remainder of the famine. In this last section of Genesis, as Jacob nears his death, he blesses Joseph's sons, and later blesses and prophesies about all his sons. As they had promised Jacob, Joseph and his brothers take Jacob's body back to Canaan for burial. Joseph later dies at 110 years of age. The story is taken up from there in the book of Exodus, where the family of Israel will live in Egypt four hundred years and will multiply into a nation of people. Whereas they have been favored by the Pharaoh who knew Joseph, they will be enslaved by later Pharaohs and will suffer until God sends Moses to deliver them and take them back to the land God promised to their fathers.

**Notes on Genesis 48-50**

48:1 - *Your father is ill* - This would turn out to be Jacob's final illness.

took his two sons - Since Joseph was special to Jacob, it was appropriate for Joseph and his sons to have their own special meeting with Jacob before all the sons met with him.

48:4 - make you fruitful *- Jacob reminds Joseph of God's promises in order to give Joseph direction for the future.

48:5 - your...sons...reckoned as mine - They will inherit shares in the promised land as heads over tribes, just like the rest of the sons of Jacob. Ephraim and Manasseh were later called "half-tribes" in order that the number of tribes remain 12.

48:13 - brought them close - It was the custom for an old patriarch to bless his children and descendants before he died. Compare the story of Isaac blessing Jacob and Esau, Genesis 27.

Manasseh...toward Israel's right hand - The right hand was the chief hand for blessing, and the custom was for the greatest blessing to go to the oldest son, in this case, Manasseh.

48:14 - right hand...on Ephraim's head - This had to be prophetic direction from God, since it was against custom. The patriarchs were the spiritual heads of their families and served as prophets and priests as well as leaders. They were enabled by the Holy Spirit to foretell the future on occasions, and when the patriarch blessed his sons, the things he said by the Spirit were prophetic. The "laying on of hands" for ordination, blessing, etc. in the New Testament descends from this Old Testament custom and from the anointing of new leaders with oil.

48:15 - blessed Joseph and his sons through him.

God...my shepherd - This is beautiful devotional praise. Jacob acknowledges God's faithful goodness to Jacob and the relationship that had grown between him and God.

48:16 - *Angel* - God sometimes dealt with Jacob through the agency of an angel who directly represented God - see Genesis 32:22-32.

48:17 - displeased because he felt that the usual custom should be followed of blessing the firstborn above his brothers. Joseph had always supposed it would be this way. Sometimes God intervenes and things do not turn out like we had pictured them.

48:18 - this one is the firstborn - Joseph may have thought that Jacob couldn't see what he was doing.

48:19 - I know - Jacob deliberately elevated Ephraim, guided by the Spirit.
younger brother will be greater - Eventually Ephraim became supreme among the northern tribes of Israel, so much so that the northern 10 tribes were often referred to as "Ephraim."

49:1 - called for his sons - for the last meeting with them before his death.

what will happen to you - Jacob would be prophesying by the Spirit of God. His predictions were fulfilled in the later history of the tribes.

49:3 - Reuben...firstborn - Would have received the birthright and inherited the leadership of the whole family, had he not sinned with his father's concubine.

49:5 - Simeon and Levi also forfeited blessings because of their excessively violent revenge on Shechem and the people of Hamor after Shechem defiled Dinah their sister. Reuben, Simeon and Levi all lost blessings that could have been theirs. Sin always has consequences, even when its guilt is forgiven by God. There are damages we can never erase and scars that will always remain.

49:8 - Judah is the first to receive a positive blessing from Jacob. He along with Joseph receive the strongest blessings.

bow down to you - Judah, with the ascension of David to the throne, would become the ruling tribe.

49:10 - The scepter of rule would remain with Judah from David onward. Even after the captivity during the restoration period, when there was no king, the governor was from the tribe of Judah. Ultimately this prophecy was fulfilled in Christ, the one to whom it belongs [the NASB has "until Shiloh comes." Shiloh is the Hebrew term from which the words are translated in the NIV].

obedience of the nations - Christ is not only "King of the Jews" but "King of kings and Lord of Lords" in all the earth.

49:13 - Zebulun's position by the sea linked it with the northern ports of Tyre and Sidon in sea trade.

49:14, 15 - Issachar...submit to forced labor - Issachar at times was subject to the Canaanites.

49:17 - Dan...a serpent - Note the treacherous attack by the Danites on Laish in Judges 18.

49:18 - I look for your deliverance - Jacob may be praying for strength, or help in dealing with death. Or this may be a prayer for his descendants.

49:22 - Joseph's future is realized in the half-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh who became prominent among the northern tribes.

49:23 - they shot at him - A reference to the wrongs of Joseph's brothers against him and possibly to his trials in Egypt.

49:24 - hand of the Mighty One - Joseph came through and prospered because of the gracious help of God.

49:25 - blessings - This is one of the most beautiful poetic sections of Genesis.

49:26 - prince among his brothers - Clearly Joseph inherits the birthright in this family.

49:29 - Bury me with my fathers in the cave - at Machpelah in Hebron. Joseph later when he is about to die also asks to be buried in Canaan.
49:31 - Sarah, Rebekah, Leah - Here we learn that the principal wives of all three patriarchs were buried at Machpelah.

49:33 - gathered to his people - His soul went to God as the souls of his fathers had. There is life after death. In Luke 16 we see Abraham in hades, the realm of the dead, as the keeper of the righteous dead. Faithful Israelites looked forward to going to "Abraham's side" ("Abraham's bosom") when they died. In Matthew 22:23ff Jesus reminded them that God said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." It is not, "I was the God of Abraham, etc." God still is their God and they as well as "all are alive unto him."

50:2 - embalm - The Egyptians were very advanced in the art of preserving the bodies of the dead. Today in museums you can look on the faces of Egyptian kings and others who lived 4,000 years ago. The bodies were "mummified," that is, dried out until they became leathery and resisted decay. First the brain and most internal organs were removed. The body was then soaked for days in a briny solution. After it was completely dried out, the body was wrapped in linen strips and placed in a coffin. Probably if the bodies of Jacob and Joseph were exhumed today, we could still see their faces.

50:5 - Let me go up and bury my father - Even though Joseph was great in Egypt, he still answered to Pharaoh and was valuable in his government service.

50:6 - Go - Pharaoh was always gracious to Joseph.

50:7 - officials accompanied him - Joseph was so important in Egypt that many representatives of the Egyptian government attended the funeral.

50:10 - lamented - Formal, ritual mourning was part of the proper respect paid to the memory of the dead.

50:11 - Abel Mizraim means "mourning of the Egyptians" (NIV text note).

50:15 - saw that their father was dead - They thought Joseph might have delayed his revenge until his father couldn't see it.

50:16 - Your father left these instructions - We cannot know if they invented this story to save themselves, or if Jacob actually did this. It seems that Jacob would have said this directly to Joseph if he said it at all.

50:17 - Joseph wept - Joseph was a truly good man with a tender heart for his brothers regardless of their past errors. It touched him that they were still afraid in spite of his earlier assurances.

50:18 - threw themselves down - Still another fulfillment of Joseph's dreams.

50:19 - Am I in the pace of God? We need to remember this statement when we are tempted to take vengeance into our own hands.

50:20 - God intended it for good and so I cannot remain bitter about it. One who has truly entrusted his life into God's hands will react much differently to the reverses of life. He knows that God is good and that God is still in control. He can trust God for the outcome and does not have to take things into his own hands. See Romans 8:28.

50:21 - Don't be afraid - Joseph was a true child of God, who is called the "Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" - 2 Corinthians 1:3. To be a true follower of God means to become like our heavenly Father. We will also be compassionate toward the undeserving if we really belong to God.
I will provide - Joseph returned good for evil - Romans 12:17-21.

50:24 - said to his brothers - It seems that Joseph's brothers outlived him, at least some of them. The term "brothers" may also include descendants of his brothers. Since Joseph had inherited the birthright and patriarchal leadership, he gathered his brothers and prophesied about their future, just as Jacob had done.

take you to the land he promised - God has a purpose for our family. He has made promises that he will not fail to keep. You have a future, the future your patriarchal fathers believed in. We today also have a future because we have God's faithful promises.

50:25 - carry my bones up - Bury me in Canaan, the promised land, our real home. The writer of Hebrews sees this request by Joseph as an expression of Joseph's faith in God's promises for the future - Hebrews 11:22.

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