



# *Finer Grounds Bible Study*

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## *Genesis (Part 2)*

### *Lesson 13: Genesis 49-50*

We have made it to the last lesson! It has been a humbling and challenging study for me. I hope that you have come away from it knowing our Lord a little better, understanding His word more fully, and encouraged to spend even more time with Him. In our last study, we saw the Israelites settling into Egyptian life, Joseph making Pharaoh even wealthier, and the preparing of Jacob's departure from this life with the blessing of Joseph's two sons. As we begin this final study, we will explore the last days of not only one, but two of the great patriarchs. Pray and let's begin.

#### **Read Genesis 49**

Jacob calls all his sons together at the beginning of chapter 49 to basically prophecy about their futures. We are not told how long after Manasseh and Ephraim are blessed that this event happens, but it seems reasonably safe to assume that it was shortly thereafter. He begins with his first-born, Reuben, who as he states, should have been "preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power". However, as we know, Reuben loses out on that preeminence. Jacob calls him "uncontrolled as water". Reuben's act of sleeping with his father's concubine, Bilhah, showed a tremendous lack of self-control (Gen. 35:33). I wonder how Dan and Naphtali felt about Reuben knowing he had committed such an act with their mother. We focus a lot on the struggle between Joseph and his brothers, and for good reason, but there had to be a lot of other

issues amongst them as well when you consider all that has transpired between their mothers and one another.

Later in the Mosaic law, we learn that someone who commits the kind of act that Reuben did is cursed (Deut. 27:20). Obviously, even before the Law was given, they knew this was wrong and Reuben suffers the consequences. As a result, 1 Chronicles 5:1 confirms that Joseph receives Reuben's birthright (double portion). Can you imagine having your dad speak of some of your greatest sin in his final words to you? Certainly, Jacob had forgiven, but this is what he remembers about his first-born son as he prepares for his departure. How very sad. Sin is indeed far reaching and destructive.

Next, we move to Jacob's second and third sons, Simeon and Levi. Unfortunately, they do not receive a positive response either. Jacob alludes to their similarities in action and/or behavior when he calls them "brothers". They were not the only sons of Leah, but they had something else in common. They were given to anger and violence. Jacob does not want to be associated with any part of this character, as he makes clear in verse 6. He proceeds to expand upon their great sin in Shechem. If you remember, they were the two brothers of Dinah who retaliated violently over her rape in Gen. 34:25-30. Jacob says here that their motives were anger and self-will. They ruthlessly murdered all the men of Shechem for the sin of one. We also



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learn here that they were guilty of animal cruelty as they “lamed oxen”. Jacob is very clear about his stance on their actions. I believe this says a lot about Jacob’s character. It is a temptation to lighten or excuse sin in the lives of those we love the deepest. I believe a lot of parents would not have agreed with their actions, but still would have defended them. Can’t you hear some parent saying, “Well, they were hurting over the great wrong that had been done to their sister. It’s understandable that they would want to retaliate.” Jacob makes no excuses for his children. They have sinned. There is no excuse that will make it not sin and Jacob refuses to partake in their sin by condoning or excusing it. His actions remind me of Eph. 5:11 when we are told, “do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them”. Jacob takes his final words as an opportunity to set a huge example to his family here and, although it was probably unpleasant to hear, what a tremendously valuable lesson to be forever etched into their hearts and minds. Sin is sin. Why we commit it or who commits it does not change that. We must condemn it and have no part in it.

As a result of their anger, cruelty, and self-will, Jacob says they will be “dispersed” or “scattered”. When they receive their land inheritance, they are indeed different from the other tribes. Simeon’s allotment ends up being oddly placed in the middle of Judah’s large land inheritance. Levi, as you know, becomes the tribe of priests and is therefore dispersed throughout the entire promised land. What an encouraging thought that despite Levi’s mistakes in the beginning, God would later set his tribe apart as priests. His punishment of being scattered would end up benefitting the entire nation of Israel by supplying

them all with spiritual guidance from the priests. Is that not just like our God? Turning something bad into something beneficial seems to be His trademark. I love Him so much for that!

Although he does not receive the double portion, Jacob’s fourth son, Judah, does seem to be the first son deemed eligible for an actual blessing. Judah’s name means “praised” and Jacob now tells him that his brothers are going to “praise” him and “bow down” to him. Of course, this makes sense, as Judah becomes the tribe of kings. Verse 10 says that “the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples”. Although the meaning of “Shiloh” is uncertain, it is believed to mean “he to whose it is” or “him to whom it belongs”, but also “tranquility”. Most scholars agree that this term is in reference to the Messiah. That meaning does make sense in the passage. Jesus is the one the kingdom belongs to and He does bring tranquility or peace between God and man.

A “scepter” holds the idea of ruling or being able to govern themselves. The Israelites maintained that ability to judge themselves (and administer punishment including capital punishment to their people) throughout their captivities under Babylon and under the Medes and Persians. They even kept that ability for a short time under the Romans, until around 11 A.D. when they removed Israel’s ability to administer capital punishment. At that time, members of the Sanhedrin are recorded as stating, “Woe unto us for the scepter has departed from Judah, and the Messiah has not come”. This should have been a confirmation to them that the



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Messiah had come. He was a youth at this point but would very soon be confounding them with His knowledge of Scripture at the age of twelve. There is a lot more we could say about Judah's blessing here as it is not only the tribe of kings, but the tribe that would produce the King of Kings, who the entire canon of Scripture is all about. However, we must press on to the other sons.

Up until this point, Jacob has been going in birth order. Now, he jumps to his tenth son, Zebulun, and does not seem to follow any order again except for ending with Joseph and Benjamin. I will not pretend to understand all of Jacob's blessings as some of them are difficult to understand and apply from our limited knowledge, but I will simply encourage us all to keep learning and trust in God's infallible word. Only a few words are said about most of the sons until we reach Joseph.

As Jacob turns to Joseph, he is once again a bit longer winded. His description of Joseph's life is written very poetically, and I love his conclusion that Joseph "remained firm" despite all that he endured. The majority of the last fourteen chapters of Genesis are about this incredibly faithful man we call Joseph. If you consider the amount of time and the number of people we have covered in Genesis, it is remarkable that over a fourth of the entire book is about Joseph's life. If you also consider his life and his unwavering faithfulness even from a very young age, I think I am more convinced than ever that Joseph was mature beyond his years, that he was that "old soul", and that he is one fantastic example of faith for us. Jacob, wise as he is, gives all the credit of Joseph's successes and blessings

to who it belongs – God. May we always do the same.

As Jacob wraps up his sons' blessings, verse 28 says that he blessed "everyone with the blessing appropriate to him". They received what they were supposed to receive. I think this is a good lesson for us. We receive what we are supposed to receive from the hand of God, whether good or bad. It is what we do with it that matters. Several of them could have complained and wallowed in self-pity at the blessing their father gives them, but it seems they accept what their father hands them. I hope we can do the same with what our heavenly Father hands us. May we readily accept our consequences that we might learn to obey, and may we always give thanks for our many blessings.

Jacob again makes his final request of being buried in the same cave as Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah back in Canaan. There would be no dispute due to uncertainty. Jacob lets all his sons know of his burial wishes and then takes that journey into the great unknown, but not alone.

**Can you think of another "problem" that could have caused brotherly turmoil between Jacob's sons?**

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**What does Deut. 21:15-17 tell us about the right of the first-born son?**

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Why do you think Jacob changes from second person to third person when he is speaking to/about Reuben in Gen. 49:4 (“Then you defiled it – he went up to my couch”)?

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Read 1 Sam. 3:10-14. What does this passage teach us that God expects from us?

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Do you think it was important for Jacob to verbalize his displeasure and rejection of Simeon and Levi’s actions in Shechem? Why or why not?

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Choose one of the seven sons that we did not discuss and study Jacob’s words concerning that son/tribe. Tell us what you learned.

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Write all the descriptions Jacob uses for the Lord in verses 24 and 25. Learn something about each one and share which one is your favorite and why.

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What do you most admire about Joseph’s character and how can you imitate that?

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### Read Genesis Chapter 50

The contrast between the end of chapter 49 and the opening of chapter 50 is a great depiction of the different views when one of God’s people passes from this life. Chapter 49 speaks for Jacob. He is “gathered to his people”. Jacob went home to rest with his family. Chapter 50 is for those left behind on earth. Joseph is full of mourning and separation. It is difficult to read verse one and not feel compassion for Joseph. It must have been a heart wrenching scene. I cannot help but wonder why we are only told of Joseph’s response and what may have been going through his brothers’ minds. Did they have sorrow for the time they robbed Joseph and Jacob of? Did they feel the loss of their father keenly as well? Did they immediately wonder how Joseph would feel towards them now? Whatever they were thinking or feeling, I imagine watching Joseph grasping his father’s lifeless body and weeping in pain had to stir a lot of emotion in that room.

Joseph has his father embalmed in Egypt before they make the journey to Canaan. The embalming process is a fascinating one and, as Scripture tells us, takes forty days to complete. The mourning in Egypt for Jacob, however, goes on for seventy days. What kind of example and influence must Jacob have been in those seventeen years to the Egyptians to illicit such an outpouring of affection from them? We do not get all the details of these patriarch’s lives, but



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sometimes their character is reflected in the responses of those who lived among them. Would non-Christians mourn over you the way the Egyptians mourned over Jacob?

With Pharaoh's blessing, Joseph sets out to bury his father in the designated cave. The journey is estimated to be over 400 miles one way. This would have been a long, hard journey and Jacob's body would not have lasted if he had not been embalmed. Joseph is joined by "all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father's household" as well as chariots and horsemen. The only ones left behind were the very small children. This makes for a rather large entourage of both Israelites and Egyptians. Have you ever attended a funeral where the deceased was so well known and loved that the building could not contain everyone who came to pay their respects? Imagine that group of people accompanying the family on an 800-mile round trip to honor and remember that person. This was no small event in size or in importance.

When they reach the threshing floor of Atad, the band of mourners stop and grieve for seven days. Even the Canaanites exclaim what a sad event this must be for the Egyptians. What they witnessed that day prompts them to name the place Abel-mizraim, which means "meadow of Egypt" or "mourning of Egypt". In case you have forgotten, Egyptians believed it loathsome to even eat with the Israelites, yet here they are (including those of the highest rank in Egypt) travelling and mourning with them for days and days. Why? Because one great man, who deserves their honor and respect, has taken his

final journey. This is really humbling to think about. I hope we can be even a fraction of the influence on our environment as Jacob must have been to these Egyptians.

The brothers fulfill their father's wish by burying him in the cave and then they all return to Egypt. The finality of Jacob's passing seems to settle in and cause the brothers concern that Joseph will retaliate against them for their former sins. When they ask Joseph to forgive them in verse 17, they refer to themselves as "the servants of the God of your father". I wonder if they are appealing to Joseph's love of Jacob, his obedience to God, or both. What I love is Joseph's response to them. He weeps. This had to be another pivotal moment in Joseph and his brothers' relationship. As they watch him weep, they fall before him humbly accepting their fate as his servants. Forgiveness and peace reign as Joseph utters what we would probably consider his most infamous words. He is fully aware that he has no business seeking revenge because he is not God. He then proceeds with, "and as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good...". Wow, what an outlook on those events! We have talked about this before, but I urge all of us to view the evil done against us as a way for God to bring about something good and do as Joseph did and forgive from the heart.

Joseph doesn't just forgive them; he assures them that he will provide for them. He comforts them. He speaks kindly to them. Can you imagine what this must have been like for his brothers? What a relief! What a gift! What a standard for us to strive for!

Joseph would have been around 56 years old when Jacob died. That would mean he lives



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about another 54 years before it is time for him to join Jacob in eternity. Joseph has lived in a pagan nation for more than 90 years of his life, yet he has remained faithful. He was faithful in trials. He was faithful in suffering. He was faithful in prosperity. He was faithful in loss. He was faithful until death. His last words to his brothers are saturated with faith. He boldly claims that “God will surely take care of [them]”. He also confidently asserts that God will “bring [them] up out of this land to the land which He promised”. God gave that oath to his father, his grand-father, and his great grand-father. Joseph simply believed God was faithful. Hebrews 11:22 lets us know that it is Joseph’s faith that prompts his request for his brothers to promise to “carry [his] bones up from here”. There was no doubt in Joseph’s mind that some day God was going to make good on His promise.

The Israelites end up being in Egypt for a total of 430 years so Joseph’s request had to be made known to each passing generation so that when the time did come, it could be fulfilled. With a faithful end, Joseph dies at the young age of 110. He undergoes embalming just as his father did and is “placed in a coffin in Egypt”. There his remains will stay until that fateful day in Exodus 13:19 when Moses leads the Israelites out of Egypt. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph were not on this earth when God fulfilled His promise, but they believed He would do it. We may not see Jesus return, but He will, and we too will enter that rest. God is faithful and we get to spend eternity with Him and men like Joseph. I am not worthy, but I am so grateful!

**Do a little reading on the embalming process and tell us what you learn.**

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**What do you think Jacob did that you could do to influence your environment?**

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**Why do you think Joseph weeps when his brothers appeal to him for forgiveness again?**

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**Do you think Joseph had any apprehensions of what his relationship with his brothers would be like after his father’s death? Why or why not?**

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**Read Romans 12:17-21. Make a list from this passage of what God wants us to do and what He does not want us to do.**

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**How did Joseph exemplify this Roman’s passage?**

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**Read Joshua 24:32. Where do the Israelites bury Joseph's bones?**

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Ladies, it has been my pleasure to facilitate our study of this wonderful book of beginnings. I hope that you have benefited from our time together and, above all, I hope you have learned that God is faithful! In that vein, I also pray you have gained a greater faith in our worthy God. Keep praying, keep reading, keep studying, and keep the faith. God bless!