

Genesis 47-50: Jacob's Last Years

Introduction

As we ended the last parsha we read, *“Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt in the region of Goshen; they acquired property in it and they were fruitful and multiplied greatly”*.

The provision of God for the Children of Israel was quite extraordinary. His plan brought Joseph to Egypt as a common slave and raised him to be the most powerful man in the country, save Pharaoh. A world-wide drought/famine that raged on for years created the impetus to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt where they would find choice land and provision, somewhat isolated from the main stream Egyptians. And in this excellent atmosphere, the descendents of Jacob prospered and multiplied, acquiring wealth and strength.

Chapter 47

Vs. 28-30 Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years under the care of his beloved son Joseph. Joseph had spent 17 years in the house of Jacob under his attentive care, prior to being sold into slavery.

Jacob was 147 years old, and he knew his time to die was present, so he called his beloved son Joseph to discuss his final arrangements. Jacob required Joseph to take a solemn oath, hand under the thigh, and promise to not bury me in Egypt. Jacob knew the significance of the Promised Land and the fact his grandfather, Abraham, had provided a special family burial plot in Hebron, the Cave of Macphelah. Jacob's first wife, Leah was buried there, and Jacob should also be laid to rest in that place.

Joseph solemnly promised Jacob his wishes would be observed. Joseph, too, likely understood the sacred nature of that cave and how important it was for Jacob to be buried there.

One of the greatest acts of charity a man can perform is to bless a person who is dying. There is no way for the dying person to repay the act of charity; therefore, this act is more righteous than others.

There is a great lesson for us today on this vignette. No matter how comfortable or blessed we are in this world, this world is not our home. Our souls originated in the presence of the Living God and it is to Him we should yearn to return. The Promised Land of our life is the presence of the Living God and we should always feel some discomfort here, away from His physical presence.

Vs. 31 Here we have a most interesting statement, *“So he (Joseph) swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed”*. Do you remember that in Genesis 37, right before Jacob sends Joseph to check on the brothers tending sheep at Shechem, Joseph reports having two dreams. The first dream has all his brothers bowing to him and the second includes his father and mother bowing down to him. Nobody was happy about these dreams! The first dream is fulfilled in Genesis 42:6 when the brothers come to buy grain. However, we do not see Jacob bowing before Joseph until this moment when Jacob makes Joseph promise to bury him in Canaan rather than Egypt.

Some sages suggest this bowing in reverence is a result of Jacob knowing for sure his beloved Joseph is willing to put the desires of his father above the potential desires of Pharaoh, the father figure Joseph has been blessed by for the past 17 years. In Pharaoh’s eyes, the father of Joseph, the one who not only saved Egypt but helped her gain tremendous wealth (livestock, grain, land and people), should be buried in the finest of locations within Egypt, and deserving a of true state funeral. With this promise, the state funeral will take place outside of Egypt, in an inferior place, with less honor for Pharaoh himself.

It is at this point that Jacob sees Joseph as a true son, a true Tzadik (righteous one), and he humbly bows before his son - thus fulfilling the prophetic dream of so many years before.

Chapter 48

Vs. 1-7 Jacob becomes quite ill, so as Joseph heard of this turn for the worse, he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim to visit Jacob. Jacob rallied some strength when he heard these two lads had come with their father, and he sat up in bed.

“El Shaddai (God Almighty) appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and He blessed me. ‘Behold - I will make you fruitful and numerous; I will make you a congregation of nations and I will give this land to your offspring after you as an eternal possession’. And now, your two sons who were born to you in the land of Egypt before my coming to you in Egypt shall be mine like Rueben and Simeon. But progeny born to you after them shall be yours; they will be included under the name of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. But as for me - when I came from Paddan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the road, while there was still a stretch of land to go to Ephrath (Bethlehem); and I buried her there on the road to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem”.

Let's take a look at what Jacob was doing here. This is very significant in the family or tribal status.

- Jacob reiterated the direct promise from God to himself and is passing this promise, covenant, to his son and grandsons.
- He is adopting Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons, which means Jacob is granting the patriarchal blessing (birth right) on Joseph by giving him a double portion; a portion given to each of Joseph's sons.
- All other sons born to Joseph will receive the normal inheritances of sons.
- Jacob then recounts the last days of his beloved Rachel, Joseph's mother.

This is a very touching episode between a father, his beloved son, and his grandsons. There is a powerful prophecy in the adoption of Ephraim and Manasseh. Ephraim (or Israel) will be the namesake for the 10 northern Israeli tribes who fall into Assyrian captivity one hundred years before the Babylonian captivity of the Judahites (Jews).

Vs. 8-20 But the blessings continued with an unusual turn of events. Jacob realizes his two grandsons are also present and he offered a blessing on them:

"O God before whom my forefathers Abraham and Isaac walked - God who shepherds me from my inception until this day; May the angel who redeems me from all evil bless the lads, and may my name be declared upon them, and the names of my forefathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they proliferate abundantly like fish within the land".

"By you shall Israel bless saying 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh'".

This is a very interesting blessing. As the two boys were standing in front of their nearly blind grandfather, Jacob, he stretched out his hands and placed them on their heads. His right hand was extended to the older boy, Manasseh, and his left on the younger, Ephraim. The right hand is said to have "spiritual primacy", therefore it is extended to the eldest son. But, Jacob reversed his hands, crossed them so his right hand was on the head of the younger, Ephraim, and his left hand rested on the head of the elder brother, Manasseh.

Joseph saw this "mistake" and attempted to correct it, but was kindly rebuked by his father who knew exactly what he is doing. We are not told why Ephraim is elevated over his brother. Unlike other cases where the younger brother is elevated, it is clear by the behaviors of the older brother why the blessing will fall on the younger. I think

we can take comfort in realizing God knows the purpose and reason and guides His servant Jacob to act as he has.

The prayer has interesting facets to it:

- Jacob knows who he is from, his lineage, and his walk with God. He understands his place in relation to Abraham and Isaac and the relationship this family has with the Living God of the Universe.
- He acknowledges God has set an angel over him to protect him in all his adventures and misadventures, and he invokes God to assign this angel over these two precious grandsons.
- As Abraham and Isaac had God-given names, (Abram to Abraham and Isaac since before his birth) and Jacob had a new God-given name, Israel, may these lads live in such a way that God will bestow a name of righteousness upon them as well.
- May they multiply abundantly in the land
- And may their names be a blessing throughout all Israel for all time. There is to this day a blessing on young boys, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh”. In other words, may you be favored by God and man as these two boys have been favored. For girls the blessing is “May God make you like Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel and Leah”. These blessings are often given over the children during the lighting of the candles each Friday evening at the beginning of Shabbat.
- Even though the prayer and blessing from Jacob is divided in the narrative, it is a continuation of the prayer and blessing he began when he was blessing Joseph earlier in this chapter.

Vs. 21-22 One last blessing to be bestowed; Israel (righteous or spiritual name) offered a final blessing to Joseph:

- God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers.
- I give you Shechem - one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the Emorite with my sword and bow. (Joseph’s mummified remains were buried in Shechem - Joshua 24:32). This location is beside the Well of Jacob, at the entrance to the valley between Mounts Gerazim and Ebal. In Deuteronomy 27 the Israelites will be commanded to build an altar here, cover it with plaster and write the Torah (Ten Commands) in the plaster. They will then divide into two camps, one camp standing on each mountain, and shout the blessings and the curses (Leviticus 26) back and forth across the valley. This location is today the modern city of Nablus, one of the major strongholds of Hamas, the terrorist organization developed within the Palestinian West Bank. In John 4:5-15, Jesus

came to the city called Sychar in Samaria, and here he spoke with a woman at Jacob's Well. Shechem is the place Abraham sacrificed when he entered the land. It is the place Jacob sacrificed, and later, Jacob's sons, Levi and Simeon, slaughtered all the men of the village and plundered the entire town.

Chapter 49

Vs. 1-28 This is a most interesting and difficult passage to read and understand. It is both prophecy and a blessing. As a prophecy it is difficult, or perhaps impossible, to see the fulfillment of the events or roles the sons would take.

Jacob gathers his sons and tells them "*what will befall you in the End of Days*". The question is whether or not this is an end times prophecy, something to be understood completely only when the final arrival of Messiah comes. Here is the big difference between the Jew and the Christian. The Jew is still looking for the Messianic Age to begin, the first and only coming of Messiah. The Christian believes Messiah came 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ, (Yeshua HaMeshiach), and will return a final time at the End of Days.

The scripture says, "*Gather yourselves and listen, O sons of Jacob (physical name), and listen to Israel (spiritual name) your father*".

- Reuben, my first born, my initial strength and vigor, foremost in rank, and foremost in power. Water like impetuosity - you cannot be foremost because you violated your father's bed, and you desecrated Him Who ascended my couch.
- Simeon and Levi, joined together in the prophecy as they were joined together in treachery. May my kingdom to be, not be joined in their conspiracy and violent ways. The men they killed were the men of Shechem. The bull they hamstringed was their brother Joseph (Deuteronomy 33:15-17). Because of the rage they demonstrated, they are accursed. They will be dispersed, separated in the kingdom to break down their alliance and danger.

Interestingly, Levi's treachery and violence with weaponry created redemption for the tribe as recorded in Exodus 32:26-29. It was the Levites who took the sword and killed 3,000 people who were reveling before the golden calf created by Aaron (chief of the Levites). This redemption caused God to declare Levi to become the priestly tribe for all time. However, Levi received no inheritance of land in Canaan. Simeon on the other hand, became lost as a tribe as they were assimilated into Judah. In Joshua 19:1 it is recorded that their tribal allotment of land is "in the midst" or surrounded by the allotment given to Judah. In Numbers their population dropped significantly, nearly two-

thirds were lost in the wilderness travels of 40 years. It is believed that it is the men of Simeon who most become involved with the Midianite women's seduction of Israel (Numbers 25). Numbers 25:9 records 24,000 men were killed by the plague that struck the Israelites as a result of the great sin. Numbers 26 records a census taken after the plague and in v. 14 the recorded population of Simeon dropped drastically from its previous census number, indicating that many of the 24,000 who perished were from the tribe of Simeon.

- Judah received the longest of blessing/prophecies of all the sons. Judah will become the one by whom the sons of Israel will become known - Jews, therefore all his brothers and their descendents will bow to Judah. Through Judah we see the kingly prophecy of the line of kings, including Messiah. *"From the prey, my son, you elevated yourself"* may very well refer to the redemption of Judah as read in chapters 38, 43 and 44. He elevated himself above the sinful life he had been living. "The scepter shall not depart from between his feet" refers to the lineage of kings to come from Judah. Judah received the "Father's Blessing" in saying that the kings shall come through him. Shiloh is the statement that makes this a messianic prophecy. Shiloh means, "he whose it is", and gave great hope to the Jews through captivity, pogroms, holocaust and the persecution in regaining the land. All righteous Jews look forward to the coming of Messiah, a time when the world will be made right, Israel will reign supreme, and God will dwell once again among man.
- Zebulun shall settle by the sea shores. This is confusing because, first of all, Zebulun is listed before his older brother Issachar; and second, because his apportioned land was not on the coast, but was land locked. However, the sages teach he is listed first because the tribe of Zebulun engaged in commerce and did much to support Issachar who invested heavily in Torah study and teaching.
- Issachar is referred to as a strong boned donkey which the sages teach signifies the spiritual role taken by Issachar as a bearer of the yoke of Torah and a cultivator of the spiritual treasures of the people.
- Dan's prophecy/blessing is confusing because Dan was the first to spiritually pull away from God and pursue pagan gods. Revelation 7:4-8 provides a listing of the tribes of Israel sealed by God, Dan is not listed there. We do not know why. Samson was the most famous or notorious of the Danite clan. Dan was given land in the area west of Judah, in the valleys (shephela) leading to the Mediterranean Sea, but because of the power of the Philistines, could not remain and eventually moved to the northern most part of Israel.

- Gad received land on the east side of the Jordan River along with Reuben and half of Manasseh. However, Gad gladly left their homes and families to travel with the rest of Israel to fight for the land and allow all twelve tribes to be able to settle in the Land. Gad returned, on his heel, by way of the same roads taken away from their allotment, to their land and families; and not one of their men was lost.
- Asher will provide rich bread and kingly delicacies. His land is a center for agriculture with beautiful fields of grain and plentiful olive trees, providing bread and oil to royalty.
- Naphtali is a hind set loose who delivers beautiful sayings. I am not sure if this is relevant, but in the days before Jesus birth and throughout His lifetime, the areas of the tribe of Naphtali were the center for righteous and traditional Jews, the very center of the area Jesus inaugurated and conducted much of His ministry, on the northern shores of Galilee.
- Joseph, a charming son, charming to the eye. The ladies chased him and embittered him; the arrow tongued men hated him. He was slandered against by Potiphar's wife, hated by his brothers who too slandered him. Yet, Joseph was like a bow firmly emplaced and his arms were gilded (strengthened). Joseph was slandered and hated by his brothers, cheated and slandered by Mrs. P. and yet he stood his ground in righteousness. *"He shepherded the stone of Israel"*; that is Joseph represented the primary personage of Israel - the best of Israel, the ideal (Zechariah 4:7). Jacob stated the blessings he bestowed on his sons are greater than that of Abraham or Isaac. How can that be? The blessing passed on to his sons includes the promises from Abraham and Isaac. He had twelve sons, far more than his fathers. His fortunes were accumulative of his fathers, and he truly fathered a nation. Joseph received the double blessing portion from his father.
- Benjamin will be a predatory wolf devouring prey in the morning and distributing spoils in the evening. Several great leaders in history were Benjamites: King Saul who conquered the Moabites, Philistia, and Edom; Mordecai and Esther; Apostle Paul. In Deuteronomy 33:12 Moses pronounces a blessing on Benjamin, *"May the beloved of the LORD dwell in security by him, who shields him all the day, and he dwells between His shoulders"*. The land Benjamin inherited lay between the tribes of Judah and Ephraim, the two namesakes for all Israel, the northern tribes and southern tribes. The southern border of Benjamin lay across the top of the Temple Mount, Mount Moriah, and the location of the temple. The temple is often referred to as the "shoulders" of God. Benjamin plays a mighty role in the history of Israel.

Ezekiel 37:16-17 *“Now you, son of Man, take for yourself one piece of wood and write upon it, ‘For Judah and for the Children of Israel, his comrades’; and take one piece of wood and write upon it, ‘For Joseph, the wood of Ephraim and all the House of Israel, his comrades’. Then bring them close to yourself, one to the other, like one piece of wood and they will become united in your hand.”* Ephraim (ten northern tribes) and Judah (southern tribes) were separated following the death of King Solomon. The northern tribes were under the reign of Jeroboam and the Judah was under the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon. The two nations never reconciled or found unity. This is a messianic prophecy representing the reunification of Ephraim and Judah, uniting the Children of Israel. Ephraim has been scattered all around the world, many of them assimilated into foreign culture, but one day, all will return. **Jacob blessed each according to his appropriate blessing.**

Vs. 29-32 Jacob gave his sons final instructions to be followed after his imminent death:

- Bury me in my father’s cave in Hebron, the Cave of Macphelah, in the land of Canaan.

Vs. 30 *“When Jacob finished instructing his sons, he drew his feet onto the bed: he expired and was gathered to his people”.*

Chapter 50

Vs. 1-6 As Jacob’s spirit left his body, Joseph was there to kiss his father goodbye, just as God promised Jacob (Genesis 46:4), “Joseph will be there to close your eyes”.

Joseph had Jacob’s body embalmed. The only two Israelites recorded whose bodies were embalmed were Jacob and Joseph. Both were returned to Israel for burial.

After his death there was a 40 day waiting period for the completion of the embalming and a 70 day period of mourning.

Pharaoh granted Joseph permission to take Jacob’s body back to Canaan and bury him in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron.

Vs. 7-14 The funeral procession from Egypt would have been one to behold.

- Servants of Pharaoh
- Elders from Pharaoh’s household and across Egypt
- All of Joseph’s household
- His brothers and their households (except the young children)
- Chariots and horsemen

Another 7 day mourning period was authorized. And Jacob was buried exactly as he wished to be, with all his sons present and in the location of his deepest desire.

Vs. 15-21 Immediately after the death and burial of Jacob, Joseph's brothers began to fear that now that Jacob was dead, Joseph might decide to retaliate for the sins they had committed against him.

Joseph responded so beautifully, *"Fear not, for am I instead of God? Although you intended me harm, God intended it for good; in order to accomplish - it is as clear as this day - that a vast people be kept alive. So now, fear not - I will sustain you and your young ones"*. Thus he comforted them and spoke to their heart.

Vs. 22-26 Joseph dwelt in Egypt until he died at the age of 110 years. He lived to see 3 generations of children through Ephraim and Manasseh.

As he prepared to die, Joseph asked his brothers to please take his body with them when they returned to the Promised Land, and bury him there.

Joseph died and was embalmed and placed in a coffin. We read that he was indeed returned to Israel and buried in the land Jacob had acquired near Shechem, the land Jacob gave to Joseph. How poignant, Shechem is where Jacob had sent Joseph to check on his brothers. The brothers had moved on to Dothan and sold Joseph into slavery from there.

It is customary for the congregation followed by the reader to proclaim:

"ChazaK! Chazak! Venischazelk"!

(Be strong! Be Strong! And may we be Strengthened!)