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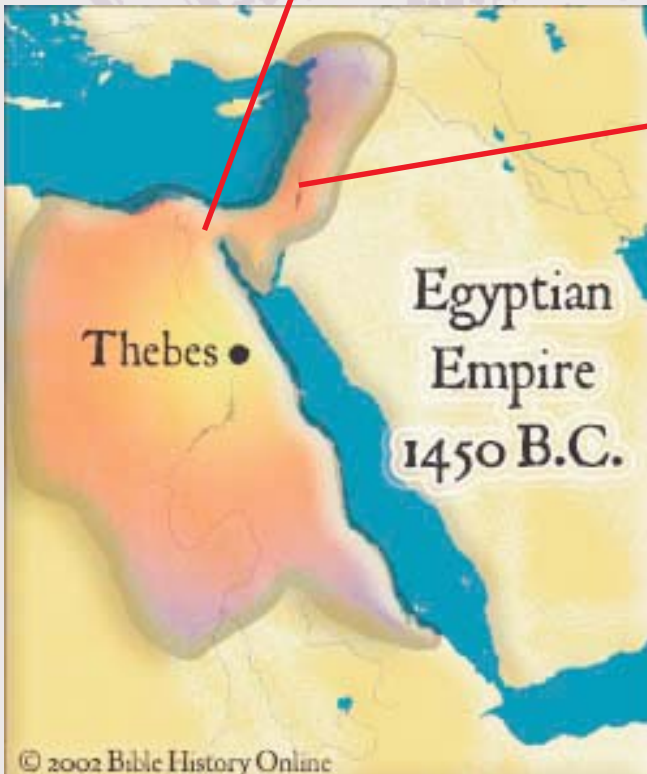
- a. Forgiveness Reaffirmed vv. 15-21
- b. Joseph's Last Days, vv. 22-26

In this fourth and final lesson on the Joseph Story we see the climax of the narrative that began in chapter 37 with the young dreamer Joseph. Joseph is now the leader of the clan, as well as a leader of the Egyptian people. The prideful arrogance that initially prompted the brothers to plot his murder has come full circle. They now humble themselves before this powerful brother, who in return extends forgiveness and love. The Joseph Story ends with the description of Joseph's death at 110 years of age.

I. Context

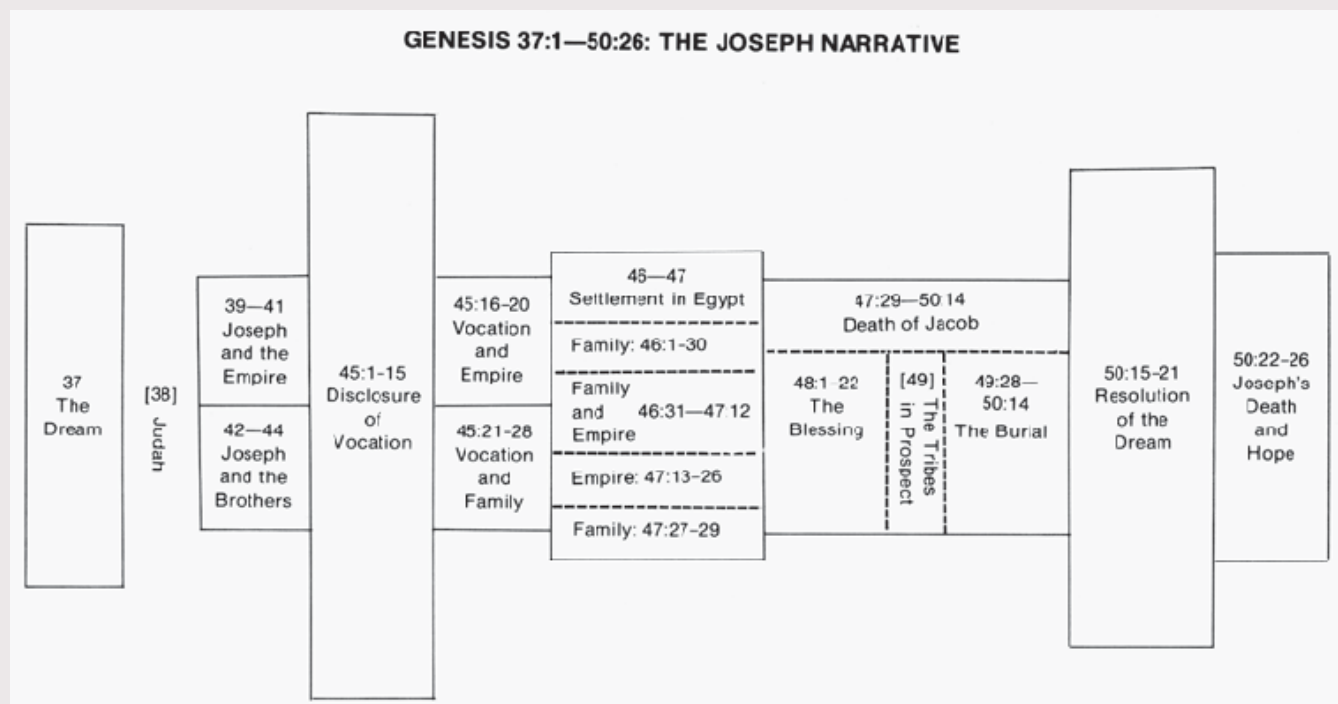
a. Historical

The setting historically is the death of the patriarch Jacob after the clan has migrated to Egypt and settled in the land of Goshen. From the time that Joseph revealed himself to his brothers in chapter 45 to this setting in chapter 50 has covered at least seventeen years according to [Gen. 47:27-28](#). Jacob and his family have moved from Canaan to the land of Goshen in northeastern Egypt and have begun to prosper. Goshen was a fertile part of Egypt, as is described in the online [Eaton Bible Dictionary](#) article: "A district in Egypt where Jacob and his family settled, and in which they remained till the Exodus (Genesis 45:10; 46:28,29,31, etc.). It is called 'the land of Goshen' (47:27), and also simply 'Goshen' (46:28), and 'the land of Rameses' (47:11; Exodus 12:37), for the towns Pithom and Rameses lay within its borders; also Zoan or Tanis (Psalms 78:12). It lay on the east of the Nile, and apparently not far from the royal residence. It was 'the best of the land' (Genesis 47:6,11), but is now a desert. It is first mentioned in Joseph's message to his father. It has been identified with the modern Wady Tumilat, lying between the eastern part of the Delta and the west border of Palestine. It was a pastoral district, where some of the king's cattle were kept (Genesis 47:6). The inhabitants were not exclusively Israelites (Exodus 3:22; 11:2; 12:35,36)."



The time comes for the end of Jacob's life and he passed away at the [age of 147 years](#). But before his death detailed instructions and blessings were given to the sons.

b. Literary



Once again, the chart from the *Interpreter's Bible* Genesis volume helps sketch out the literary context of our passage.

Chapters [46](#) and [47](#) describe the migration of Jacob and his clan from Canaan to Goshen in Egypt. When he set out on the trip his first stop was Beer-sheba in southern Canaan where he had grown up in Isaac's home. There he offered sacrifice to God and God appeared to him in a vision to reassure Jacob that the trip to Egypt was according to divine plan ([46:1-4](#)). From there they traveled to Egypt to meet Joseph and the pharaoh. According to [46:27](#), some seventy people were in the group making the trip. The clan traveled straight to Goshen in northeast Egypt, where Joseph met them ([46:28-34](#)). Goshen was a settlement apart from the Egyptians somewhat because of their negative feelings about nomadic shepherds ([46:34](#)).

The meeting with the pharaoh ([47:1-12](#)) brought his confirmation of Joseph's decision to locate his father's family in Goshen. Jacob was 130 years old at this point ([47:9](#)). The continued severity of the famine provided Joseph the opportunity to further secure the pharaoh's control over all the territory of the Egyptians ([47:13-26](#)). For the next seventeen years Jacob, his sons, and their family prospered in Goshen ([47:27-31](#)).

When Jacob realized his end was near, he extracted a promise from Joseph to bury him back home in Canaan ([47:29-31](#)). Joseph made the promise. But before death and burial would come some other final words. At the very end Jacob particularly blessed Joseph and his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh ([48:1-22](#)), giving them an extra share of his inheritance. Next all the sons were called in and their father pronounced the traditional blessing on each of them ([49:1-28](#)). He also instructed them where to bury him in Canaan; it was the burial ground where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and his wife Leah were buried ([49:29-33](#)).

[Gen. 50:1-14](#) describe the burial of Jacob as he had instructed. The one unusual aspect was that the embalmment of Jacob was according to Egyptian custom and the burial service was Egyptian in orientation and the trip to Canaan included a large contingent of Egyptian royal officials. The mourning lasted for one week at the burial site on the threshing floor of Atad at Machpelah near Mamre. Joseph then returned to Egypt, along with his brothers.

This introduces our passage in 50:15-26.

II. Message

The study passage naturally falls into two sections: vv. 15-21 and vv. 22-26. The first deals with the reassurance of forgiveness by Joseph of his brothers' actions years before in selling him into slavery. The second describes the final days of Joseph before his death.

a. Forgiveness Reaffirmed vv. 15-21

NASB

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" 16 So they sent a *message* to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 17 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? 20 "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. 21 "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

NRSV

15 Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?" 16 So they approached^{F194} Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this instruction before he died, 17 "Say to Joseph: I beg you, forgive the crime of your brothers and the wrong they did in harming you.' Now therefore please forgive the crime of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also wept,^{F195} fell down before him, and said, "We are here as your slaves." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? 20 Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. 21 So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

NLT

15 But now that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers became afraid. "Now Joseph will pay us back for all the evil we did to him," they said. 16 So they sent this message to Joseph: "Before your father died, he instructed us 17 to say to you: 'Forgive your brothers for the great evil they did to you.' So we, the servants of the God of your father, beg you to forgive us." When Joseph received the message, he broke down and wept. 18 Then his brothers came and bowed low before him. "We are your slaves," they said. 19 But Joseph told them, "Don't be afraid of me. Am I God, to judge and punish you? 20 As far as I am concerned, God turned into good what you meant for evil. He brought me to the high position I have today so I could save the lives of many people. 21 No, don't be afraid. Indeed, I myself will take care of you and your families." And he spoke very kindly to them, reassuring them.

Footnotes:

F194: Gk Syr: Heb [they commanded]

F195: Cn: Heb [also came]

Comments:

After the funeral of Jacob, the brothers become concerned that Joseph may have been harboring a grudge against them for selling him into slavery years before. This came after the very tearful reunion described in [45:1-15](#). One is tempted to wonder how sincere they were in that initial reconciliation, yet it must be remembered that that event had taken place some seventeen years earlier. Also, that although the brothers lived in Egypt during that time, they lived in Goshen in the northeast and Joseph lived much further south in upper Egypt near Heliopolis, at least a 100 miles away from them. Although there was occasional contact, it wasn't as though they lived 'next door' to each other and thus saw one another often. The few meetings that are described in chapters 46 through 50 tend to have an official tone, since Joseph functioned as Egyptian royalty and was never apart from this during his adult life. Thus their fear is quite

understandable.

Their fear prompted them to approach Joseph with the reminder of their father's instructions to Joseph before his death regarding forgiving them of their action against Joseph. The *New Interpreter's Bible* volume on Genesis (iPreach online) has some helpful comments about the rest of the episode:

In vv. 16-17, the brothers send a messenger (cf. 37:32) to present their concerns to Joseph, suggesting their high anxiety (the NRSV adopts the LXX reading, omitting the messenger). They couch their concerns in terms of their father's deathbed wish, rather than a direct personal request. The upshot of Jacob's request was that the brothers be reconciled, more specifically that Joseph forgive them the crime they committed. No evidence exists that Jacob actually said this, but Joseph remains as much in the dark on this as the reader! This is the only text in which Jacob gives a clear indication that he knows what the brothers did to Joseph (cf. 42:36). Nothing suggests it is a fabrication, spun out of the brothers' anxiety. In fact, the last reference to a report from the brothers about what Jacob said (44:24-29) appears truthful. The progress of the story toward the unified family of chap. 50 reinforces their speech as an honest report.

Building on their father's request, the brothers call themselves "servants" (anticipating a key theme in Exodus) of "the God of your father." The author grounds their appeal in their common faith in the God of Jacob; this binds them to one another in the heritage of their father. The theme of forgiveness occurs twice in v. 17, in Jacob's request and voiced by the brothers. Words for "sin" and "evil" are used four times, in both their father's speech and in their own words. This high consciousness of their crime suggests that the encounter in chap. 45 did not resolve the matter for the brothers. Even with the assurances given them by Joseph, they still live with the guilt of what they have done.

Joseph weeps, though not in the presence of his brothers (cf. NRSV). Once again, this marks a move toward the resolution of the conflict. He had wept with his brothers in 45:1-2, 14-15 at the occasion of a reconciliation. Here he weeps over their message, words revealing an ongoing mistrust. The weeping may also signal to the reader that he will not seek revenge, marking another stage in the development of the story (see 42:24).

The reference to Joseph's weeping leads into the brothers' coming before him (the NRSV's "wept" is based on an emendation of the Hebrew), without waiting for any response from the messenger. The brothers do obeisance before Joseph and declare themselves his servants/slaves (once again, the Exodus theme). They intensify the messenger's words with these personal actions. The brothers' bowing before Joseph does not fulfill his dream in 37:7 (as it does in 42:6; 43:26; 44:14). Joseph will now reject such status as an inappropriate relationship between himself and his brothers.

The words to have no fear enclose Joseph's response (vv. 19-21). This signals an oracle of salvation, a word of comfort and assurance. Such language commonly appears as God's first word in theophany (see 21:17; 26:24; 46:3); Second Isaiah uses it to speak to the exiles (41:10-14). We also find this language in an oracle of salvation at the birth of Jesus and at his resurrection (Matt 28:10; Luke 2:10).

Joseph gives three reasons to ease their fears. First, he responds in tones that are both rebuke and reassurance: "Am I in the place of God?" The question portrays a profound human judgment in this matter, not a "humble declaration of noncompetence."²²³ It probably has a double reference—to their request for forgiveness and to their offer to become slaves. (a) The latter occurs immediately before his response. Joseph is not God, thus they can be assured that he will not behave as a pharaoh to them. He remains subject to God as the brothers are; they stand together under the authority of a divine other who works purposefully on behalf of them all. This theme anticipates the acts of the pharaoh who did not know Joseph (Exod 1:8) and the fivefold use of servant language in Exod 1:13-14, with the authoritarianism and potential for oppression. The implication here functions as it does in Exodus; the people of Israel will be the servants of God alone. (b) Regarding forgiveness, Joseph seems to reject a guilt/forgiveness approach (as in 45:3-8), leaving that up to God. At the same time, his words and deeds reveal a conciliatory spirit, showing that no revenge on his part is in view.

Second, regardless of their intentions, and Joseph names them evil (עַרְרָה; see 44:4-5), they can be assured their actions have been drawn into God's larger purposes for goodness, and these have come to prevail. The God who created the world and called it good has been about life and its preservation in and through all of these events, despite their intentions for death. Joseph, by clearly naming the brothers' actions as "evil"—something not done in 45:3-9—makes this matter public. His positive action has their evil behaviors in clear view, and the brothers now know that the evil they have done no longer counts against them.

Third, they will be cared for. In v. 21, Joseph comforts them and speaks tenderly/kindly to them (both words are used in Isa 40:1-2 in a context of forgiveness), assuring them that he will provide for them, with special attention to the children, and hence their future (as in 45:10-11; 47:12). This involves not just words, but concrete practical realities. The brothers do not respond, and though vv. 24-25 assume a positive response, the brothers' final silence in the narrative may indicate a sense of foreboding, or at least openness, about future relationships.

What can we learn from this? Quite clearly it reminds us of the passing of a parent or parents and the uncertainty that follows. Sometimes this uncertainty grows out of concern over how the inheritance is going to be divided up. Sometimes it is concern over whether the brothers and sisters will drift apart and loose contact with one another. When parents pass away, the anchor holding many families together is lost with tragic consequence. When tension has been present among adult children, the departure of a parent, especially the last one, can create a destabilizing force that leads to renewed and intensified hostility.

When the last parent dies, this has special impact on even the adult kids. One very vivid memory that will always remain with me is standing at the foot of my father's grave in 1991. Next to him was my mother's grave who had died in 1975. Looking into the setting sun in the western sky left me with one of the most lonely feelings that I've ever experienced. Both parents were gone. They had been anchors and examples in my life. Christian leaders who faithfully served God all their lives, they had been my inspiration, especially in my adult life. Now they were gone, and I was facing a very uncertain future at that time in my life. Only through God's help and leadership was I able to move from that tragic moment in my life to continue seeking to serve Him.

Another insight gleaned from this passage is the integrity of Joseph. He had already given his forgiveness and reflected on the deeper purposes of God through all the events of slavery in Egypt. He not only reaffirmed that to his brothers, but renewed his promise to take care of them all the days of his life. His spiritual insight in recognizing that man's evil was used by God for good challenges us to always seek the deeper meaning of life's events. As the apostle Paul would say centuries later (Rom. 8:28, NRSV), "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."

b. Joseph's Last Days, vv. 22-26

NASB

22 Now Joseph stayed in Egypt, he and his father's household, and Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23 Joseph saw the third generation of Ephraim's sons; also the sons of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were born on Joseph's knees. 24 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here." 26 So Joseph died at the age of one

NRSV

22 So Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father's household; and Joseph lived one hundred ten years. 23 Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation; the children of Machir son of Manasseh were also born on Joseph's knees. 24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die; but God will surely come to you, and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 So Joseph made the Israelites swear, saying, "When God comes to you, you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 And Joseph died, being one hundred ten years old; he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

NLT

22 So Joseph and his brothers and their families continued to live in Egypt. Joseph was 110 years old when he died. 23 He lived to see three generations of descendants of his son Ephraim and the children of Manasseh's son Makir, who were treated as if they were his own. 24 "Soon I will die," Joseph told his brothers, "but God will surely come for you, to lead you out of this land of Egypt. He will bring you back to the land he vowed to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." 25 Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath, and he said, "When God comes to lead us back to Canaan, you must take my body back with you." 26

hundred and ten years; and he was embalmed and placed in a coffin in Egypt.

So Joseph died at the age of 110. They embalmed him, and his body was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Comments:

This passage brings us to the end of Joseph's life. Quite interestingly, although he lived to the ripe old age of 110 years, he did not outlive most all of his brothers who were older, in some instances several years older.

As a grandfather of eleven grandkids the blessing of God on Joseph to be able to enjoy the children of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, and also their children -- his great grandchildren -- is of particular significance to me. Increasingly that looms as one of God's greater blessings.

The *Believer's Church Bible Commentary* volume on Genesis has some helpful observations about this passage:

But the story of the family is not over yet. This short epilogue closes this chapter and at the same time opens the next generation. The blessing of God which enables one generation to follow upon another has undergirded the narrative from the orderly presentation of creation (Gen. 1) to this final genealogical note (v. 23). God's blessing has survived the raging flood of divine anger and the unexplained sterility of Sarah and Abraham. That quiet blessing, which makes it possible for the human story to continue beyond a single chapter, will carry the family still further into the future.

Joseph's farewell speeches also look toward the future (vv. 24-25). For the only time in this saga, the speech of Joseph appropriates the tradition of promise which led the ancestral stories from the beginning (v. 24) (Brueggeman, 1982: 379). For all the fertility of Egypt, this land was not home. Egypt was not the land of promise. The promise of a home is not fulfilled in this "beginning" book. That promise will carry Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Ex. 20:2) and bring them to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8).

Joseph's burial request separates him from the land which brought him wealth and power, food and honor (v. 25). He too wants his moment in the family story to be connected with the people's future (cf. Jacob's burial request, 49:33). Joseph spent his life faithfully living his dreams (37:5-11). The dreams end when Joseph is embalmed in Egypt. But those dreams were but a part of the larger promise, and Joseph calls the community to wait for God's visit in behalf of the promise.

Thus the Joseph Story comes to an end, but in reality it's not an end. Instead, it is a beginning, for it sets the stage for the formation of the children of Israel who will leave Egypt centuries later to become a nation of Covenant People through whom God would work to bless the world.

Although in some ways the subject is rather morbid, yet it has importance, especially for many of us who have reached 'senior citizen' status. As we approach the end of our days, can we look back over our lives and conclude that God has indeed used us to impact other lives for good? Also, can we now see more clearly how we have been a part of something far grandeur and bigger than we are? I think few things can be more satisfying than to look back over a life of faithfulness to God and then recognize that God was really up to something wonderful in and through our life. Life always brings its share of heartaches and pain. But in the grand scheme of things God brings a lot of joy and happiness into our life along the way as well. The deepest joy is the sense of having been useful to the Lord in His purposes, however small it may seem to have been. Yet, God did good in and through us. That's an indescribable joy!

The story of Joseph in chapters 37 through 50 provide us with one of the great, inspiring narratives in the Old Testament. Joseph is consistently a positive example in his adult life, this in spite of a horrible beginning as a spoiled brat child. God accomplished wonderful things through his openness and faithfulness to God's providential hand at work in Joseph's life. This story reminds us of the great possibilities that are present in our lives, if we are but open to God's leadership through the good and the bad.