

Genesis Chapters 49b-50 Summary - John Karmelich

It took a little over half a year, but I made it to the final lesson in Genesis. Whenever I come to the end of a big book, I like to think about the big picture. The book opens with God creating the world. Then it ends literally describing two of the main book characters lying in their coffins. If that's all God wants to share with us, it'd be a very sad story. Sometimes I'll ask my atheist acquaintances, do you ever wish you were wrong? What do you say to a child dying of cancer? All death is tragic no matter what age it occurs at. Again, if that's all there is to life, even if we lived an exciting life and got to hear God speak to us like these people did, it'd still be a tragedy! The bible actually says little about the next life as it's intended to be a guide to how to live this life. We get a few clues in Isaiah, Revelation (both at the end of each book) and I suspect life will be a lot like it was before sin began in the garden of Eden! If God doesn't want us to focus much on heaven other than the fact it exists and He wants us to use our life for His glory, then that's what I'll stick to doing as it's His world, so I'll accept that as my marching orders!

One of the main purposes of Genesis is to introduce us to "Beginnings". Not just the world but also the fact that God separated for Himself specific people to glorify Him despite their shortcomings. Adam & Eve sinned, and God didn't say, "You're out of here, I'll create two new people!" God works with what He created faults and all. When one of their sons killed another, God didn't start over then. Even when the world was flooded and God only saved eight people, the saved were not perfect and it is a matter of realizing God determined how long each of us will live. He knows who will be saved and it's our job to use our lives to honor Him. Then God picked one person Abraham, and that lead to parts of his family (chosen members), which become the 12 tribes of Israel when Exodus begins, over 400 years after the end of Genesis. The book effectively ends with arrangements for two funerals, first for Jacob, as he is the father of the 12 sons that became the 12 tribes of Israel and then of one of his sons who became the top administrator in Egypt.

Yes, I'm going to get to the specifics of this text in a second. I suppose I wanted everyone to see what's the big picture: that we go from creation to a coffin just as each of our lives in earth started off as those who are saved (God knows who He picked before we were born but we became born-again when we'd come to that logical conclusion about life!) and our lives on earth end in a coffin (or cremated) I do not believe it matters. Religious Jewish people argue one should be buried in Israel as the patriarchs, but I would argue if God can create us, He can resurrect us no matter how we are buried, so to speak! That's out of my system, so it's time to discuss the text itself!

I wanted to start this last lesson in the middle of Chapter 49. The first part was the patriarch Jacob now on his deathbed, making predictions about each of his 12 sons that would come true over time. Though they were there without any of their children present, the first line here refers to all the sons as the: "12 Tribes of Israel". That alone is a clue that despite Genesis ending with Jacob's death as well as Joseph, that phrase is a clue there's more to the story. The first word (in Hebrew) of the next book Exodus, has a mark over the first letter connecting it, with the intention of Exodus being connected as the story will continue. I'm making a big deal about this, because what I'm getting at is our death is not in any means the end of our relationship with God. While there's no direct reference to a resurrection in any of those Old Testament books there are a few people raised from the dead, implying our life goes on after we're gone. I know that's old news to Christians, but I want you to grasp that even here in Genesis despite the fact two key lives ends at the end of this book, it's not the end of the story!

After Jacob finished giving the predictive and cryptic prophesies over each of his children, (meaning it was about their behavior in some cases and in other cases it was a prediction about where their families would settle in Israel when they return a good 400 years later). After that, Jacob was pretty much done other than to say where he'd like to be buried. Remember they were in Egypt. Jacob said he wanted to be buried next to his parents, grandparents and one of his two wives (not his favorite). Recall Jacob did have two wives and two concubines, so the "12 siblings" had different moms. You'd think Jacob would desire to be buried with Rachel, his favorite wife and she was buried in Bethlehem. (That one!) I think he wanted to be buried with "dad, grandpa and his other wife" is Jacob considered the resurrection. He predicted that the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. Judah's mother is the one buried in the same cave as "dad and grandpa". Can I prove that's the reason? No, but since Israelites and Christians should always consider how our life affects the next one, even in death, Jacob's sending a message he's looking forward to the next life. Does that mean we Christians should desire to be buried in Israel? Of course not. If God's God, He can resurrect us however and wherever we are! The issue was a message to look forward to the eternal future! Bottom line, Jacob said it and then he died.

That leads to Chapter 50. The main event was Joseph organized a big funeral process for his father. It meant a detailed body preparation process (Egyptians are famous for that!) Joseph asked permission to go to Israel for the burial (he was still a top person second to Pharaoh, so he needed to ask). He went to Israel. The text even implies they traveled east of the Jordan then crossed over (more fresh water is on the "Country of Jordan side" (for a lack of a better term) then they crossed over. We also learn that the little kids had to stay behind. Either for travel purposes or the Egyptians wanted to make sure that they returned! Bottom line, they got to the cave where his parents were buried and had more rituals when it was time to bury Jacob.

The final part of the book has to do with the end of Joseph's life. For the newcomers he was one of the 12 sons and was the Prime Minister in Egypt! Decades earlier, Joseph's brothers didn't care for him, so they considered killing him but just ended up selling him into slavery. Amazing how guilt can carry for so many years. The brothers now lied to Joseph saying, "Dad told you to forgive us!" Joseph then gave a speech that said in effect, "God judges people, not me, so pray to Him for forgiveness. As far as what you did, Joseph said, "all of you meant that for evil, but it was all part of God's plan to get all of you in Egypt to begin the 400-year prediction!" God told Abraham the Israelites won't inherit the land for 400 years. The text doesn't say if Joseph understood that, but I suspect he did. Genesis ends telling us that Joseph got to live to see his grand (or great-grand) children and died at 110. His final instructions were to have his bones brought to Israel when the Exodus occurred! It meant Joseph went through that long embalming process and was buried in Egypt till "leaving time" about 400 years later!

OK most of us know this story or at least parts of it. If we believe in Jesus, then assume we believe we will be resurrected. Obviously, we don't have to be buried in Israel to get that privilege. What is it that we should get from this passage about death? For starters, the obvious "that's not how it ends"! Stop to think what Jesus calls us to do as believers, we a witness for Him! Share with others how life does not end at the coffin. Share how it's not about "our good deeds outweighing our bad deeds" but just to trust in Him completely to pay for our sins! Hopefully this "coffin" ending reminds us of that truth!

With that said, hope you like this study. I wrote a more detailed one some years back. If you want to read that, click on one of the links on this page. It is still a joy to study this stuff and again I'm grateful for you reading this. Oh, on the last page of the longer study is a list of my Genesis sources. The only new one is John MacArthur's lectures on the first 12 chapters of Genesis and Dennis Prager's (Jewish) commentary