

GROUNDS OF FAITH CAFÉ: “Genesis” (Subtitled: Is there a snake in your Garden too?) Further subtitled: Lessons from the Garden! Lesson 34. (Gen chapter 49:1-50:26). For lesson copies, go to <http://www.montgomerychurch.org/resources8.html>

Introduction/Review: Today, we close a significant phase of our “journey” from the inception of creation through God’s “call” to Abram, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph. In early chapters of Genesis, God spoke clearly to Abram, Isaac and Jacob – often incurring conflicted responses from the Patriarchs. Joseph has not heard from God directly, but he clearly knows of God and “sees” God’s guiding hand in his life story. “*Journey*,” which serves as the overarching metaphor for the narrative, has been and will continue to give us tremendous insights about lives lived by “faith,” the human-God relationship, and the transforming reconciling power exercised by God.

Read 49:1-33: This chapter recounts Jacob’s final words to his sons. Often termed the “*blessings*” of Jacob, in reality, the chapter reveals the “*futures*” of Jacob’s sons. Recall that in chapter 48, Jacob claimed Joseph’s sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, as “his own sons.” The result is they will have status equal (if not superior) to Reuben and Simeon (Jacob’s first and second born from his wife Leah). As you read chapter 49, be aware that Joseph, in effect, receives double blessing – his descendants will experience fertility and abundance. Note also how past actions affect the “blessing” received. As additional information, also be aware that the children of Jacob’s handmaids (Dan & Naphtali from Rachel’s maid Bilhah; and Gad & Asher from Leah’s maid Zilpah) receive much less commentary from Jacob than for those sons birthed by his wives.

- Re-read 49:3-12: Past actions frame the futures of Jacob’s first 4 sons by Leah. What lesson, if any, do you draw for your life from these verses? Briefly discuss.
- Re-read 49:22-33: Scripture recounts the blessings for Joseph & Benjamin (sons of Rachel) and then details Jacob’s last wishes. What strikes you as important in these verses? Briefly discuss.

Read 50:1-14: The picture drawn in these verses is one befitting the demise of Egyptian royalty.

- What relationship is described between Joseph and the Pharaoh? Do words such as “trust,” “integrity,” “fidelity” fit into your image? What lesson do you draw, if any? Discuss.
- What significance, if any, do you attach to the burial place for Jacob? Discuss.

Read 50:15-17: Joseph returns to Egypt after burying Jacob in the “promised land.” Note his brothers’ concern and the words they use in framing their concern to Joseph.

- What concerns Joseph’s brothers at this point and what tactic do they use in approaching Joseph with their concern? Discuss.
- Now re-read Joseph’s initial reaction when he first met his brothers after they had sold him into slavery (45:1-15). According to 50:15-17, do you think Joseph has changed after Jacob’s death? Briefly discuss.

Read 50:18-21: Like he did in 45:1-15, Joseph gives another verbal response to his brothers.

- What relationship does Joseph establish in this dialogue with his brothers? What specifically does Joseph promise his brothers and do you think it would be appropriate to characterize this picture as one of genuine reconciliation, or not? Discuss.
- Re-read 50:19-20. Now talk about Joseph’s insight briefly and then compare it to one of the first images provided by God about man in Gen 3:1-6, particularly verse 5. We began one of the first parts of our “journey” in the Garden of Eden where the serpent challenged Adam and Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil with the temptation that by doing so they could take the place of God and determine for themselves good and evil. What lesson, if any, do you draw from Joseph’s response in comparison with Adam and Eve’s? Discuss.

Read 50:22-26: What happens to Joseph and what counsel does he give in his final words? In chapters 37-50, Joseph has been transformed by God over his lifetime. What do you learn from this concluding chapter that may help you in your own transformation? Discuss.