

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF GENESIS

PART 8 – final comments on chapters 37-50

Up to this point the story of Jacob, who was meant to be a believer in God, was a sad account of deceit, bargaining and failure as a son, a brother, a husband and a father. Jacob demonstrated vividly the life history of what Paul described as the carnal Christian, or man of the flesh.(I Cor.3:1) He belonged to the Lord but lived in his own strength. God had not finished with Jacob yet, but for the moment the focus switched to his son Joseph. Somehow through Joseph, Jacob was going to find the secret of life which had so far eluded him. Joseph, the first son of the favourite wife, Rachel, was himself the favourite son.(chapter 37) Jacob had learned nothing from the mistakes of his father who favoured Esau over Jacob, and his grandfather who favoured Isaac over Ishmael. Not surprisingly his brothers were jealous. The problem was made worse first by Joseph acting as his father's spy on his brothers, and second by the unwise way he related his God given dreams about his future greatness. Like Jesus, he was rejected by his own (Jn.1:11) who planned to kill him but then sold him for the price of a slave.(Matt.26:15) Joseph's brothers deceived their father as he had once deceived his own father.(Gen.27)

Chapter 38 digresses to relate an unsavoury episode in the life of another brother, Judah. Ignoring the example of his ancestors he married an unbeliever and not surprisingly produced some godless sons. The first died because of his sin, the second cheated on his dead brother. His widowed daughter-in-law deceived Judah who committed adultery supposing her to be a harlot and then was embarrassed by being caught out in his hypocrisy. The resulting twins were competing from birth, just like their grandfather Jacob.(Gen.28) The remarkable part of this story is that from this line Jesus Christ would one day be born.(Matt.1:3) God uses us despite our sin.

Chapter 39 finds Joseph a slave of Potiphar, the captain of the Egyptian palace guard. As a faithful slave of God, not just his master on earth, he excelled and was trusted. He was tempted by his master's wife but remained faithful.(Heb.4:15) He was falsely accused but remained silent.(Mark 14:61) He was thrown into jail where he might well have died. Again he was faithful as a prisoner and was therefore trusted.

Like Jesus he found himself between 2 other prisoners.(Luke 23:33) One will live and one will die. He accurately interpreted their dreams but the king's cupbearer forgot Joseph when he was safely back in the royal palace.(chapter 40)

Two long years later it was Pharaoh's turn to be given a prophetic dream by God. (chapter 41) At last the cupbearer remembered Joseph, the expert on dreams, and he was brought hurriedly, after a good wash, to the palace. Before answering the king, Joseph explained that what he would share would be God's wisdom not his own. He then interpreted the dreams which foretold 7 good years in which grain needed to be saved before the 7 bad years which would follow. Like Jesus he had God-given insight into the hearts of others. Obviously, Joseph pointed out, Pharaoh would need a man at his right hand whom he could trust. He was immediately raised up to that position just as Jesus will be raised to the right hand of the Father.(Acts 7:56) He was given all the authority of the king to use the king's resources wisely for the benefit of his people.(Matt.28:18) Joseph's ministry began at the age of 30.(Lk.3:23) God gave him a wife and 2 sons who were a constant reminder of the goodness of God.

In chapter 42, the story returns to Jacob and the rest of the family, some 20 years after they last saw Joseph. The brothers were sent to Egypt to buy grain. When they met Joseph he recognised them but they failed to recognise him.(Lk.24:16) He suggested they might be spies and imprisoned them for 3 days, to give them just a taste of his own suffering. They were compelled to leave one brother behind as evidence of their good faith in promising to bring the youngest brother, Benjamin. They left Egypt with what they supposed was a fair bargain, money for food, only to discover when they reached home that they had paid nothing but rather received grace.

Soon the food had gone and more was needed. At first Jacob was fearful to let them go, but need finally won out and they set out once more, again expecting to have to bargain for what they needed. Grace seemed too good to be true and they were apprehensive. Expecting punishment they found themselves being lavishly entertained by Joseph, without charge. Benjamin, his true brother, received the greatest blessing. Joseph was enjoying himself. His brothers were beginning to be convicted.(chapter 43)

Again when they departed they not only received their money back but Joseph gave them his cup.(Lk.22:17) Confronted on their way home by Joseph's servants with the apparent theft of the cup, they were compelled to return to face Joseph. Now deeply convicted they told more of their story. Judah was prepared if necessary to die in his youngest brother's place. His heart was changing.(chapter 44)

At last Joseph revealed himself to his brothers. Expecting the worst they were overwhelmed by yet more grace, in his forgiveness of them. Joseph had now just one more wish, to see his father again. For the last time they returned to Canaan, absolutely laden with gifts, the grace of Joseph totally undeserved. Jacob was told the story and could not believe it until he saw for himself the laden wagons. Grace was the aspect of God that Jacob had never understood. Finally he did. His one desire now was to live the rest of his life in the presence of Joseph, the one who gave grace. (chapter 45) As his other self, Israel, Jacob set off for Egypt. His journey began with sacrifice after which God spoke to him again to assure him that His plan to bless him had not been cancelled despite the wasted years. This time there were no piles of stones or bargains. He was learning to receive grace. Father and son were reunited.(chapter 46)

Joseph brought his father into the presence of Pharaoh, just as Jesus brings us into the presence of His Father. Jacob's testimony before the king was a sad one of many wasted years. Joseph was now the means of immense blessing to the whole family for the rest of their days.(chapter 47) The end of Jacob's life was coming close. First he blessed Joseph's sons with God given insight into their futures. Like his father Isaac (Gen.27) he recognised that the younger would be the greater. This was the first real act of faith by Jacob as noted by the writer of Hebrews.(Heb.11:21) In chapter 49 Jacob continued to be the mouthpiece of God as he spoke about each son in turn. He rightly anticipated that it would be through Judah that the Christ would come. In death, Jacob's body returned to the promised land, but it was Joseph's work not his own doing. All God promised him so many years before would happen – despite his weak, inconsistent faith.(chapter 50). The book began with creation and ends with resurrection.