

The End of the Beginning of the Promise of Blessing

Genesis 49:28-50:26

Genesis begins in the Garden of Eden. A place where God's presence and blessing were known and experienced to Adam and Eve.

But this blessing was lost when they ate the forbidden fruit. It wasn't so much the fruit itself, but their insistence to go their own way rather than submit their will to that of their covenant Lord.

Because of their rebellion, God subjected the world to death. Nothing would be quite as it was at first. The world was subjected to decay. And men and women would live their whole lives in fear of dying. Because at the end of death in this life was the shadowy fear of an eternity apart from the God's kindness and blessing.

But while evil and suffering and death were God's just punishment, God also began to proclaim to Adam and Eve a promise of the recovery of blessing.

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:15** I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

God would use a son of Eve to crush the head of Satan, and in so doing, lift the curse.

The Fall into Sin had been quick and effortless. But redemption out of sin would prove far more difficult.

The rest of the book of Genesis is the beginning of God's promise of blessing.

And now we have come to the end of the beginning of God's promise of blessing.

God made specific promises to Abraham.

He promised to bless him. He promised to make him into a great nation.

He promised to give him a land that would become a home of great blessing.

He promised to dwell with him in this land.

Abraham did not receive these promises in his life.

Nor did Isaac and Jacob, heirs of these same promise by supernatural grace and faith.

In Genesis we see a pattern develop: God's people spend their lives waiting on God's blessing. And then they die.

We have come to the end of Genesis.

How fitting that Genesis ends with two funerals. And wedged between them is the recurring fear in the hearts of the brothers of wrath.

Unless God is able to conquer death, then God's blessing is not worth its weight in salt.

And unless our faith enables us to face death, it too is worthless.

Read Genesis 49:28-33.

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel.
This is what their father said to them
as he blessed them,
blessing each with the blessing suitable to him.

29 Then
he commanded them
and
said to them,
"I am to be gathered to my people;
bury me with my fathers
in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the
Hittite,
30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah,
to the east of Mamre,
in the land of Canaan,
which Abraham bought with the field
from Ephron the Hittite
to possess as a burying place.
31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah
his wife.

There they buried Isaac and Rebekah
his wife,
and

32 there I buried Leah-
 the field
 and
 the cave that is in it
 were bought from the Hittites."
33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons,
 he drew up his feet into the bed
 and
 breathed his last
 and
 was gathered to his people.

Mainly out of convenience, more and more people are choosing to be cremated. The costs of burial are significantly higher than cremation. And in our mobile society, people have diminished connection to any one location for burial.

But as we can see in these verses, the place of burial mattered greatly to the Patriarchs. Jacob is emphatic that he wants to be buried with his fathers, in the land of Canaan. He cares so deeply about this that he gives his children a command:

“I am to be gathered to my people, bury me with my fathers...”

Jacob is very specific. He wants to be buried in the very cave in which Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and even his wife Leah were buried.

It is likely that Jacob has great personal affection for his family. But it is more than personal affection that motivates him. Otherwise, he might have asked to be buried next to his beloved wife, Rachel.

Jacob is motivated by his hope that God would make Abraham's family into a great nation.

And Jacob is motivated by his hope that God would give to Abraham and his children a great land of blessing.

In his burial, Jacob points his descendants to these two great hopes.

He makes clear to them that death itself will not prevent God from fulfilling these promises.

He continues to hope in these promises with his dying breath. And in his death, he calls his children and their children after them to place their trust in these same promises.

Jacob makes clear that what matters most to him is our abiding faith in God's covenant promises.

And by continuing to trust even with his last breath we see that his hope was not for this life alone, but for a life that would endure after death.

I am thankful that the writer of Hebrews makes clear the thinking of the Patriarchs.

Hebrews 11:13-16 ¹³ These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. ¹⁴ For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. ¹⁵ If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

In his death, Jacob maintains his hope in a better country.

It is this same hope that lives in all who believe in Jesus Christ. This hope joins us together with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. All those who refuse this hope, even if they are in some way connected to God's people on earth, will not have a place at the eternal feast.

Being a physical descendant of Abraham is not enough. A Jewish child may hear the promise of blessing from his earliest days, but if he or she does not embrace that blessing in faith, he will be just as lost as those outside the people of God.

At the same time, God is able to grant faith to those outside the people of God. This happened occasionally in the OT with people like Rahab and Ruth. But with the coming of Christ, God would take the promise of blessing to the Gentiles and vast numbers place their hope in Jesus.

Ephesians 2:18-22 ¹⁸ For through him we both (Jewish believers and the Gentile believers) have access in one Spirit to the Father. ¹⁹ So then you (Gentile believers) are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, ²⁰ built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, ²¹ in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. ²² In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Jacob wants to be buried with the saints who went before him. His hope is joined with their hope. It will be together, with them, that he will experience the promised blessing.

We too are united with all God's people, both geographically and historically. We are one with those who believe all over the world and throughout history.

God's purpose of making His entire people one body is seen in His waiting to give any of his people the fullness of blessing until He gives that blessing to all of them.

When a saint dies, his spirit goes to be with the Lord. But his or her body remains in the ground. Not until Jesus returns at the resurrection with their body be raised. And on this day every saint will receive their glorified body at the same time.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Paul speaks with the clarity of one who has seen the resurrected Christ. But Paul's hope is the same hope that was shared by Jacob, and by Abraham and Isaac before him.

Jacob pointed his children to that future hope of a resurrection where all of God's people would together enjoy a perfect country, a country in which God would dwell with His people.

Are you looking forward to being gathered together with all of God's people?

Are you living your life hoping in a better country? A heavenly one?

Joseph demonstrates his continued faith in the covenant promises by taking the lead in carrying out his father's command.

Read Genesis 50:1-14.

Then
Joseph fell on his father's face
and
wept over him
and
kissed him.

2 And
Joseph commanded his servants the physicians
to embalm his father.

3 So
the physicians embalmed Israel.
Forty days were required for it,
for that is how many are required for
embalming.

4 And
the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

And
when the days of weeping for him were past,
Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh,
saying,

"If now I have found favor in your eyes,
please speak in the ears of Pharaoh,
saying,
5 My father made me swear,
saying,
'I am about to die:
in my tomb

that I hewed out for
myself
in the land of Canaan,
there shall you bury
me.'

Now therefore,
let me please go up and bury my father.
Then
I will return."

6 And
Pharaoh answered,
"Go up,
and
bury your father,
as he made you swear."

7 So
Joseph went up to bury his father.
With him went up all the servants of Pharaoh,
the elders of his household,
and
all the elders of the land of Egypt,
8 as well as all the household of Joseph,
his brothers,
and
his father's household.
Only their children,
their flocks,
and
their herds
were left in the land of Goshen.

9 And
there went up with him
 both chariots
 and horsemen.
It was a very great company.
10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad,
 which is beyond the Jordan,
they lamented there
 with a very great and grievous lamentation,
and
he made a mourning for his father seven days.
11 When the inhabitants of the land,
 the Canaanites,
 saw the mourning on the threshing floor of
Atad,
they said,
 "This is a grievous mourning by the Egyptians."
 Therefore
 the place was named Abel-mizraim;
 it is beyond the Jordan.
12 Thus his sons did for him
 as he had commanded them,
13 for his sons carried him to the land of
Canaan
 and
 buried him in the cave of the field at
Machpelah,
 to the east of Mamre,
 which Abraham bought with the field
 from Ephron the Hittite

to possess as a burying place.

14 After he had buried his father,
Joseph returned to Egypt
 with his brothers
 and
 all who had gone up with him
 to bury his father.

Besides being very cool that Jacob is given a royal funeral by Pharaoh, we see in these verses that Joseph points his fellow Egyptians to the Abrahamic hope.

Egyptians had a hope in the afterlife. It was a false hope, but it was a hope, nevertheless.

The Egyptian hope depended upon the careful and meticulous preservation of the body, and the burial of that body in the land of Egypt.

You can see how Joseph's request to bury his father "in the land of Canaan" would have been a rejection of Egyptian doctrine. Jacob's body is embalmed according to Egyptian royal custom. But the fact that it is carried all the way to Canaan is certainly not according to Egyptian faith.

Not only would this burial in Canaan have been a witness to the Egyptians. It would also be a witness to the Canaanites. How strange it would have been to see a large Egyptian retinue accompanying a small band of shepherds as they buried one man in a cave in their homeland?

The oddity surely would have raised questions. And the story may have become the fuel of legend.

Do not underestimate the importance of living out your faith before the world around you. We are called to proclaim the Gospel message. But we are also called to live our lives in such a way that our hope in the resurrection is evident.

There are countless ways that believers demonstrate their hope in eternal blessing.

Every time we bow our hearts to God, seeking His will above our own, we are seeking eternal blessing.

Every Sunday when we rest from our labors to worship our Lord and Savior, we are seeking eternal blessing.

When we choose to love even our enemies and refuse to take revenge on those who hurt us, we are seeking eternal blessing.

But we should not forget the more symbolic ways that we might point others to our eternal hope. So much of what is done in this chapter is for symbolic value. Jacob did not have to be buried in Canaan to experience the resurrection. But he wanted to be so buried for the symbolic value.

For some reason, we care less about symbolism in our day. Historically, churches had graveyards next to them. We, like most newer churches, have not made this a priority.

They wanted to express their faith in a coming resurrection of all believers. Of course, it is not necessary to be buried in a Church cemetery to be a part of that great resurrection. But they can help us to remember that our hope in the resurrection is not ours alone, but shared with all who have placed their faith in Jesus Christ.

Funerals and memorial services are also great ways to express our faith in God's covenant promises.

But notice that Joseph's faith in the covenant promises does not prevent him from grieving.

The people gather to grieve the loss of one that they love. And this grief is felt simultaneously with their hope in the resurrection.

We do not grieve as those without hope. The sting of death has been removed. We are no longer slaves of our fear of death.

But death remains the last enemy. Jesus wept over the death of his friend Lazarus.

I understand and do not condemn what are commonly called "Celebrations of Life". But I am opposed to the idea that it is not appropriate for Christians to grieve the death of loved ones. Some will grieve more than others, or over a longer time. But death is worthy of mourning, even for those with a sure hope in eternal life.

After all, the brothers are very clear on one thing: They have committed serious evil against Joseph. And rather than trust Joseph's word of forgiveness, the brothers seek their own means of manipulating Joseph to be kind to them. They decide to send a message to Joseph, making up a command that Jacob gave them, to further pressure Joseph to be kind to them.

16 So
 they sent a message to Joseph,
 saying,
 "Your father gave this command before he
 died,
17 'Say to Joseph,
 Please forgive the transgression of
 your brothers
 and
 their sin,
 because they did evil to you.'
 And now,
 please forgive the transgression
 of the servants of the God of your
 father."

Rather than trust Joseph's previous pronouncements of forgiveness, the brothers continue to act out of fear. In sending this message the brothers reveal that their hearts are still driven by fear rather than love.

There is a healthy fear of God that drives us to respect and honor and love God. But God does not want us to live in perpetual fear of his wrath against our sin. That wrath has been fully poured out upon our Savior Jesus Christ.

This is what John means when he writes:

1 John 4:18 ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love.

Joseph recognizes immediately that his brothers do not trust him. And they doubt his love for them.

This is why he reacts as he does:

**Joseph wept
when they spoke to him.**

Your Heavenly Father reacts in a similar way when you fear to draw near to Him. He has made the way into His presence through the shedding of His blood. He weeps when we continue to doubt His perfect love for us.

Romans 8:32-34 ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-

more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

18 His brothers also came
and
fell down before him
and
said,
"Behold,
we are your servants."

19 But
Joseph said to them,
"Do not fear,
for am I in the place of God?"

It is clear from these verses that the brothers view Joseph as their Lord. That would be consistent with Joseph's dreams. And we have already connected their fear of Joseph with every believer's continuing fear of God's wrath.

But Joseph looks at his brothers differently now. He does not want to be lord over them. He scolds them with a question, "am I in the place of God?" Whatever they think of Joseph, he views them as equals – brothers in the body of Christ.

It is as a brother, that Joseph reflects upon their sin against him.

20 As for you,
you meant evil against me,

but
God meant it for good,
to bring it about
that many people should be kept alive,
as they are today.

21

So
do not fear;
I will provide
for you
and
your little ones."

Thus
he comforted them
and
spoke kindly to them.

Joseph acknowledges that he has been hurt by the evil they committed against him.

He even acknowledges that they will have to stand before God as Judge and give an account of their actions.

But what does Joseph not acknowledge?

He does not acknowledge that the evil actions of his brothers have thwarted God's good intentions for his life. And even more to the point, their evil actions have not derailed God's covenant promises of blessing.

This brings us to one of the most important lessons concerning God's promised blessing.

If God is going to fulfill his covenant promises, then they cannot be dependent upon the actions of evil men.

If they were, then we would never have any assurance that they would be fulfilled. One way or another, the blessing would continue to be frustrated.

Joseph is telling his brothers that even while they were committing evil actions against him, intending his destruction, God was intending those same actions, not only for the benefit of Joseph as an individual, but also for the benefit of all God's chosen people.

I do not want to get into a philosophical discussion of God's sovereignty and man's free will, today. I would be happy to have that discussion with anyone who wants after the service or during the week.

But what you must accept is that God is sovereign over His covenant promises. When He promises blessing, there is no one or no thing in this entire Universe that can prevent Him from accomplishing His Holy Will.

To deny this is to deny your hope of redemption. Joseph uses these truths to comfort his brothers. He is able to love his brothers because he knows that their previous evil actions have not separated him from the love of God.

Many of you have been hurt by others. Some of you have been hurt deeply by others in the Church.

Nothing will quench your anger for these wrongs more than knowing that God is absolutely sovereign over them and is using them for your eternal good and His eternal glory.

The brothers have repented of their sin. Joseph is not ignoring the need for personal repentance. We should not either. Repentance is a necessary ingredient in experiencing true reconciliation with God and with one another. But so is a firm belief in God's absolute sovereignty over every evil committed against us.

Instead of anger, Joseph comforts his brothers and speaks kindly to them.

What a great model for us in the Church today!

Read Genesis 50:22-26.

22 So
 Joseph remained in Egypt,
 he
 and
 his father's house.
 Joseph lived 110 years.
23 And
 Joseph saw Ephraim's children
 of the third generation.
 The children also of Machir

the son of Manasseh
were counted as Joseph's own.

24 And
Joseph said to his brothers,
"I am about to die,
but
God will visit you
and
bring you up out of this land
to the land that he swore
to Abraham,
to Isaac,
and
to Jacob."

25 Then
Joseph made the sons of Israel swear,
saying,
"God will surely visit you,
and
you shall carry up my bones from here."

26 So
Joseph died,
being 110 years old.
They embalmed him,
and
he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Joseph's 110 years represents a long and full life of blessing.

Joseph speaks words of reassurance to his family.

But his reassurance anticipates future trials.

God will surely visit you.

That means that God will show up in your time of need.

And at this time, God will bring you up out of this land and into the land of promise.

Even though the ultimate land of promise is the New Heavens and the New Earth, the piece of soil between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River would also belong to Abraham.

This Promised Land would itself function as a foreshadow of the Eternal Promised Land. But it was important for many reasons that God redeem His people from Egypt and bring them back to this place.

Before God will ever bring about His eternal kingdom, He will establish a temporal kingdom for His people.

Joseph knows this. And he demonstrates his confidence that God would bring His people out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, by making his brothers swear that they would carry his bones with them when they go.

The fact that Joseph wants his bones carried to the Promised Land declares his hope in the resurrection. He is modelling the actions of his father.

Conclusion:

1. May you live your life hoping in the eternal blessing.

Christians are called to receive the good things of this life with thanksgiving to God. We are to enjoy this world. But we are not to place all of our hopes in this world. We are to fix our eyes upon Christ. As this world frustrates us in one way or another, we live with joy knowing that nothing can tarnish our eternal hope.

It was to this future hope that Jesus directed the hearts of his disciples when He instituted the Lord's Supper.

Luke 22:15-18 ¹⁵ And he said to them, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. ¹⁶ For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." ¹⁷ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he said, "Take this, and divide it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes."

2. May you rejoice that no evil done against you can diminish in the least the fullness of blessing that is yours in Christ Jesus.

1 Peter 1:3-7 ³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being

guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

3. May God's perfect love for You drive out all fear and encourage you to approach with boldness the throne of grace.

Ephesians 3:11-12 ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord, ¹² in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through our faith in him.

4. May you point the next generation to your eternal hope...

Hebrews 11:39-40 ³⁹ And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, ⁴⁰ since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Our study of the book of Genesis has come to an end. But we are not really leaving Genesis behind. The promises of this book continue on throughout the OT and are fulfilled to us in the Coming of Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 2:14-18 ¹⁴ Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵ and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery. ¹⁶ For surely it is not angels that he helps, but he helps the offspring of Abraham. ¹⁷ Therefore he had to be made like his brothers in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. ¹⁸ For because he himself has suffered when tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

There is no other name under heaven by which we can partake of eternal blessing.

Place your hope in Jesus Christ – in his death as bearing the punishment for your sin.

And in his resurrection, as guaranteeing your hope of eternal blessing.

Amen.