

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 26: Jacob's Blessing, Death, and Joseph's Faith -- Genesis 49:1-50:26

The old man is dying, and he gathers his twelve sons around his bed for the last time. "Come together," he says, "that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come." And one by one, Jacob speaks over each son a word that is part blessing, part prophecy, part honest reckoning. He does not flatter them. He names Reuben's instability, Simeon and Levi's cruel anger, the failures and the strengths of each. But when he comes to Judah, his voice rises into something far greater than a father's blessing. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah... until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." A king is coming from Judah's line, a ruler to whom the nations will bow. From a deathbed in Egypt, Jacob is looking down the centuries and seeing the Messiah.

Then Jacob breathes his last, and Genesis pauses for a great and solemn procession, the body of Israel carried up out of Egypt, all the way back to the cave where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah already lie. Even in death, Jacob is staking his claim on the promise. And when the brothers return to Egypt, an old fear flares up in them. Now that their father is gone, will Joseph finally take his revenge? They send a trembling message, they fall down before him, they offer to be his slaves. And Joseph weeps, because after all these years they still do not understand his heart, or his God.

And then Joseph speaks the verse that gathers up the whole tangled story of his life, and in a sense the whole book of Genesis: "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." He does not pretend the wrong was not real; it was evil, and he says so. But he has seen the hand of God beneath it all, weaving even the worst that was done to him into a plan to save many lives. "Am I in the place of God?" he asks. He will not play judge; he will forgive, and comfort, and provide. It is one of the most Christlike moments in the Old Testament.

Genesis ends not with a triumphant return to the Promised Land but with a coffin in Egypt, and yet it ends in hope. Joseph, dying at last, gathers his family and says, "I am about to die, but God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." And he makes them promise to carry his bones home when that day comes. By faith, Joseph looks past his own death to God's certain future. The book that began with creation and the fall, with a promise that the offspring of the woman would crush the serpent, ends with a worshiping, forgiving man pointing his family toward the redemption still to come. Read this final passage and let it lift your eyes, past every evil and every grave, to the faithful God whose plan was always moving, through Judah's line, toward a King named Jesus.

Group Discussion: Joseph told his fearful brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive” (50:20). How does this one sentence capture the whole story of Joseph’s life, and what does it teach us about how God works in our lives?

Personal Reflection: As he died, Joseph looked beyond his own life in faith: “God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land” (50:24). Where do you need to trust God for a future you may not live to see, holding onto His promises beyond what you can presently grasp?

Read Genesis 49:1–50:26

Study Questions

1. In blessing his sons, Jacob prophesied over Judah, “The scepter shall not depart from Judah... until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (49:10). How does this prophecy point forward to Christ, the King from Judah’s line (compare Revelation 5:5), and what does it reveal about God’s plan unfolding across Genesis?
2. Jacob foresaw a King to whom “the obedience of the peoples” would belong, fulfilled in Jesus. What does it mean for you, practically, to live under the rule of Christ the King, giving Him your obedience and allegiance?
3. Jacob’s words over his sons were honest, naming both strengths and serious failures (such as Reuben’s instability and the violence of Simeon and Levi, 49:3–7), reflecting the real consequences of their choices, yet God’s grace would still work through them. What does this teach us about facing the truth about ourselves and about God’s grace?
4. How honestly do you face the truth about your own character, including your failures and their consequences? How can honest self-assessment and the hope of God’s redeeming grace go together rather than cancel each other out?
5. After Jacob’s death, the brothers still feared Joseph’s revenge, but Joseph reassured them, wept, and asked, “Am I in the place of God?” (50:15–21). What does this teach us about the completeness of true forgiveness and about not playing God as judge over those who have wronged us?
6. Do you carry lingering guilt over forgiven sin, or withhold full forgiveness from someone who has wronged you? How does Joseph’s example free us both to receive forgiveness fully and to extend it completely?
7. “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive” (50:20). How does this verse hold together the reality of human evil and the sovereignty of God’s good purpose, and how is the same pattern seen supremely at the cross (compare Acts 2:23)?
8. Where do you most need to trust that God is working good through hardship or wrong done to you, without pretending the wrong was not real? How does Joseph’s perspective help you?
9. As he died, Joseph spoke by faith of God’s certain future, “God will surely visit you and bring you up out of this land,” and gave instructions about his bones, trusting a promise he would

not live to see fulfilled (50:24–25; Hebrews 11:22). What does this teach us about a faith that looks beyond our own lifetime to God's faithful promises, and how does Genesis end in hope even with a coffin in Egypt?

10. Look back over the whole book of Genesis, from creation and the fall to the promise of the offspring who would crush the serpent, to the line of Judah and the King to come. Name one specific way God has used this study of Genesis to form you and to draw you closer to Jesus.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 11:22, Joseph by faith speaking of the exodus and giving directions concerning his bones; Revelation 5:5, the Lion of the tribe of Judah who has conquered; Genesis 50:20 with Romans 8:28, God working all things for good; Genesis 3:15, the first promise now advancing toward fulfillment; 1 Corinthians 15:20–26, Christ the firstfruits and the final victory over death.