

JOSEPH - FROM PIT TO PRIME MINISTER (Volume 3)

Chapter 1 Genesis 47:13-26 – Joseph, the wise manager

The earlier verses of Genesis 47 reveal how Joseph's father Jacob and his brothers were happily settled in Egypt, in the land of Goshen known as the district of Rameses. There Joseph provided his father, brothers and all the rest of the wider family with food, and by this provision their lives were preserved through the remaining years of the dreadful famine that was afflicting the whole area. How good God had been to this small family, protecting and preserving them from destruction by the marvellous promotion of Joseph to prime ministerial position in Egypt. This group of seventy individuals (see Genesis 46:27; Exodus 1:5; Deuteronomy 10:22), though small in the world's eyes, was very precious to God. They were his people and therefore his purposes for them could not be overthrown or frustrated. Even a severe famine was not going to be able to separate them from his love or stop the Lord from keeping them. And what was true for Joseph's family is also true for Christian believers today. We are precious to God and nothing can separate us from his love in Christ (see Romans 8:28-39).

The narrative in Genesis draws our attention at this point to how Joseph conducted matters during the remaining years of the famine, and the details are very instructive giving us

an insight into the severity of the conditions and the work Joseph did and how he did it.

1) The prevailing conditions in Egypt (v13).

As the famine continued for a further five years we can summarise what happened by simply saying things went from bad to worse. As time progressed, so the devastation caused by the famine increased and the entire area, including Canaan, the land where Jacob and Joseph's brothers lived previously, were in a dreadful condition. We read in Genesis 47:13: *"There was no food, however, in the whole region because the famine was severe; both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine."* These are very graphic words, and we need to note the absolute nature of the phrase *'There was no food...'* It was not that there were only very meagre harvests, but there were none at all! Then that word *'severe'* gives added stress to the serious conditions people were living in. And if that was not sufficient, we are also told *'both Egypt and Canaan wasted away because of the famine.'* The whole area was depleted, and both people and animals were starving and exhausted from lack of food. These were harrowing days for the peoples of these nations, and the fact that the famine affected Canaan reminds us that if Jacob had not come to Joseph then he and his family would have died. The Lord's intervention for them was truly remarkable and timely, and a great comfort to believers today when we have to face various trials. The Lord is not taken by surprise and is well able to help us in them and bring us through. God's care for his people is genuine and far-reaching, and nothing is too hard for him to overcome.

2) The shrewdness of Joseph.

a. Joseph's integrity (v14).

Throughout the years of this famine Joseph acted with great wisdom and integrity. Remember, he was both a servant of the Lord and a servant of Pharaoh. Therefore, even though he was in a very high position in the land, this did not mean he could abuse that position for his own ends. Sadly many in our world have done that and many still do. They are promoted in their place of work only to exploit those under them, or to manipulate the accounts so that they can make themselves rich at the expense of their employers or customers. Sometimes those in government positions have in effect stolen the wealth of their own country, depriving the people of even basic human rights and needs, in order to make their own families rich. In so many parts of the world today bribery is considered as normal practice in business. We need to remember that these and a host of other malpractices so prevalent at present will one day be called to account by Almighty God. Those guilty will have to answer to him, with eternal and dreadful consequences. Therefore these things should never be seen amongst the Lord's people. And Joseph's example during this famine period shows us he was a man who was above reproach. He never once cheated either Pharaoh or the people who came to him for help, but acted honourably all the time. Indeed, even the way he provided for his own family was (v12) *'according to the number of children'*. He gave them just what they needed and did not allow favouritism to influence his judgement. So we read the people came to buy food from Joseph (v14), and Joseph

collected all the money in Egypt and in Canaan *'..and brought it to Pharaoh's palace'*. He did not cheat Pharaoh out of what was rightly his as ruler of the land.

b. The people's growing need (v15-19).

When all the money was used up and the people came to him again for food, he sold them food in exchange for their livestock (vv15-17) and they received food sufficient for the next year. When all that food was gone, the people came to him again pleading for his help, and their words show just how desperate they were (Genesis 47:18-19): *"We cannot hide from our lord the fact that since our money is gone and our livestock belongs to you, there is nothing left for our lord except our bodies and our land. Why should we perish before your eyes – we and our land as well? Buy us and our land in exchange for food, and we and our land will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed so that we may live and not die, and that the land may not become desolate."* Clearly they were at an end of themselves and viewed service to Pharaoh and the loss of all their land as necessary to preserve their lives, and so they were prepared to go that far.

It is difficult to imagine just what suffering there was that compelled them to make such a request. But life was at stake, and therefore they acted in this extreme way! Although we know the Pharaoh alive during Joseph's time was obviously one who cared for his people (or he would not have asked Joseph to make the large stores of food for the famine period), but to be willing to sell yourself to someone else is a sure sign of desperation. Yet the Egyptians did just that.

c. An important contrast.

One cannot help but note the contrast between these people and those today who refuse to follow Christ. These people's lives were at stake, and people today have their eternal life and well being at stake. A day is coming when God will judge the wicked and they will be cast off for ever into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth (see Matthew 8:12, 13:41-42, 22:13, 25:30; Luke 13:28). Mercifully God has provided us with a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shed his precious blood at Calvary that sinners might be forgiven. He died in their place to take the punishment they deserved. (See Romans 3:25, 5:9; Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:14, 13:12; 1 Peter 1:19; 1 John 1:7, 4:10.) He has told us that all who believe in him receive eternal life (John 3:16). We read in 1 John 5:12: *"He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."* Even though God has made this wonderful provision through the Lord Jesus Christ, many refuse to come to him, refuse to follow him, refuse to become his disciples. How unwise and foolish they are to respond to the Lord Jesus Christ like this! How clearly the example of these starving Egyptians emphasises this folly, because those who become the servants of Christ are not sold into drudgery and bondage, but into wonderful blessing and liberty. All who follow him have their every sin forgiven, they receive eternal life, they are brought in the family of God's people, and are constantly in the care of Almighty God who never slumbers nor sleeps (Psalm 121). But still thousands, even millions refuse to follow God's dear Son as their Saviour.

d. Joseph's consistent integrity (v20).

Considering the hopelessness and desperation of the people, coupled with the power and authority invested in Joseph, this was an ideal situation for an unscrupulous man to take advantage of for his own personal gain. **BUT** Joseph refused to give in to any such temptation and remained as honest and upright as he had always been. So it was that (v20) Joseph bought all the land from the people in exchange for food, and he gave that land to Pharaoh. Joseph did not buy any of it for himself. He still refused to profit himself at the expense of Pharaoh or the people, and maintained his integrity throughout.

Joseph's godliness was consistent, and it affected every area of his life, including his business life. He stands as a challenge to us to be consistent in our own walk with God and our personal holiness. God expects us to be men and women of untarnished integrity. Charles Swindoll in his excellent book on the life of Joseph called 'A Man of Integrity And Forgiveness' has written, *"Integrity keeps your eyes on your own paper during the test. Integrity makes you record and submit only true figures on your expense account. Integrity keeps your personal life pure and straight, regardless of the benefits and personal perks that might come your way through compromise."*

Integrity is something that is very strong, and yet it can be costly. I know a Christian believer who had an important position in a construction company. His boss told him to alter the accounts and put in false figures, under the threat that if he did not he would lose his job. His integrity would not allow him to do this and he refused, and he lost his job!

That was a very costly decision, but the Lord did not fail this man and all his needs and those of his family have been met. How important it is for Christian believers to maintain that consistent holy life at church, at home, at work, at school or college or university, wherever we may be. There have been some who claimed to be believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, and certainly looked as if they were when they met with other Christians, but in their work situation acted as if they were unbelievers, thinking nothing about using bad language or being corrupt! Others have begun well, and initially followed the Lord wholeheartedly, and forsook sinful and corrupt ways, but then with the passing of time have become spiritually lethargic, and old sinful ways have begun to creep back into their lives. Remember the Church at Ephesus in Revelation 2:4 had ‘...forsaken their first love’. They were no longer living for Christ with the same zeal and eagerness. Similarly, there was the Church at Laodicea who had become lukewarm in their relationship with the Saviour. The Lord Jesus said this about them in Revelation 3:15-16, *“I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! So, because you are lukewarm – neither cold nor hot – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”* Notice that Jesus said it was their ‘deeds’ which revealed this sad condition. Their daily conduct betrayed the fact they were cooling in their relationship with the Lord! The Lord Jesus called them to repent of their sinful ways and to walk in the path of holiness and righteousness again. (See Revelation 2:5, 3:19.) If we have begun to fail the Lord like that, then we

also need to repent and put matters right with him. Mercifully the Lord is gracious to believers when we genuinely do repent, as John has declared for us (1 John 1:7): *“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* And then John added this in v9: *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*

As far as Joseph was concerned, he was wonderfully consistent. He walked with God every day, and lived each day for God and his glory. Joseph loved God so much that he served God faithfully. He knew the eyes of the Lord were constantly on him. There was not even a small amount of corruption in the man, neither could he be accused of hypocrisy, thus he bought all the land for Pharaoh and kept none of it for himself (v20). How he must have pleased the Lord as well as Pharaoh. And, of course, by working in this upright way he was establishing and strengthening Pharaoh’s hand and kingdom.

3) Joseph’s wisdom (v21-26).

In verse 21 we read that *‘Joseph reduced the people to servitude...’* and the Hebrew means he moved them into cities, because it made it much easier to be able to feed them and later to distribute seed for growing when the time was right, as this was where the stores were kept. One exception to this was Pharaoh’s concession to the Egyptian priests who had their own land and received a regular allotment of food from Pharaoh, so they did not sell their land because they had no need to do so (v22).

Then we read in verse 23ff that Joseph began to distribute seed to the people and he instructed them that they were to return a fifth of the crop each year to Pharaoh, but the remainder was to be kept by them as seed for the following year and for their food. Remember, it was a fifth that was stored by Joseph in each of the years of plenty before the famine began. And we see Joseph's wisdom again for he did not overload the people. They had sold themselves into slavery to Pharaoh, but Joseph did not treat them in a tyrannical way. He did not cruelly burden them and extract much more of the crop each year. And in so doing he was not only ensuring that Pharaoh got a fair return from the people, but also ensured they would not complain that they were under the burden of too great an amount to give to Pharaoh. This in turn would create a happy workforce in the land, and help establish stability in Egypt. Joseph was just and wise.

What is interesting is that the response of the people to these conditions is recorded for us (Genesis 47:25): "*You have saved our lives,' they said, 'May we find favour in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh.'*" Their response to Joseph was one of gratitude, not resentment, and so we see that his graciousness and wisdom won the day. He had treated them with dignity and they had responded accordingly. You know, many years later the exact opposite took place after the death of king Solomon in Israel. One of his sons, a man named Rehoboam, became king and the people came to him and asked him to ease the burden of tax his father had imposed upon them. They described it like this in 1 Kings 12:4:

"Your father put a heavy yoke on us, but now lighten the harsh labour and the heavy yoke he put on us, and we will serve you." The young king sought advice on this matter, and the elders who had served his father wisely advised him to lighten their burden, but sadly he ignored that advice. Instead, he heeded the guidance of his young friends who told him to increase the burden. They advised the young king to say to the people (1 Kings 12:11), "*My father laid on you a heavy yoke; I will make it even heavier. My father scourged you with whips; I will scourge you with scorpions.*" The tragic outcome of his foolish behaviour was that a great revolt arose and the kingdom became divided and the young king lost the willing service the people had promised him. If only he had remembered the example of Joseph's wisdom in the way he treated the people in Egypt, but alas he did not, but acted out of selfish motives with disastrous consequences. In Joseph's case the outcome was so much happier. Indeed, we are told in verse 26 that the practice of the people paying a tax of one fifth of their produce each year was so good that it continued right down to when the book of Genesis was written by Moses.

Joseph reminds us that in our relationships with others, even those we may be over, for example in our work situation, we should still deal with them with grace and wisdom. Remember, Paul has instructed us in Colossians 4:6: "*Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.*" If you are a believer then it is important to remember that all our words and actions have an effect on

others for good or bad. Therefore we need to seek the Lord's help to be like Joseph in our dealings with others, so that nothing we may do or say will hinder the work of the gospel or turn others away from the Lord.

Chapter 2 Genesis 47:27-31 – Joseph's loyalty as a son

The Lord's goodness to his people continued during those early years in Egypt. Genesis 47:27 tells us, "*Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number.*" So Joseph's relatives increased under the blessing of the Lord. And as Genesis 47 draws to a close we are given a little insight into Joseph's relationship with his father, whom he loved dearly. Remember that later on when God gave Moses the Ten Commandments one of those was that we should honour our parents (Exodus 20:12), and this was something that Joseph certainly did. He loved his father, and the fact that his father was now very old and that Joseph himself was in high position in the land, never interfered with his respect and loving regard for Jacob. Jacob lived a further seventeen years in Egypt until he reached the great age of a hundred and forty seven years (v28). Such a great age is quite remarkable by modern standards, and we are told that Jacob was aware that he was soon to die (v29). That is always a sober experience, whether it is that we are spared to live a very long life and we see our strength waning, or even when sadly we may be struck down by a deadly disease or illness. Remembering the brevity of life helps to concentrate the mind on important issues. Indeed, in Psalm

90 Moses prayed like this in verse 12, "*Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.*" Doing this helps us to ensure we are right with God, it stimulates us to consider eternal things as much more important than the temporary things of this world, it increases our concern for our families and loved ones, and it demonstrates the reality of our faith as we prepare for heaven. On this occasion Jacob also had his heart and mind fixed on things in the future. He remembered God's promise to give the land of Canaan to his people. This promise first came to Abraham, then Isaac, and it had been repeated to Jacob himself, and what is so instructive is that Jacob did not doubt God's promise in any way, because he called Joseph to him and asked him to promise that when he died Joseph would take his body and return to Canaan to bury him there (vv29-30). Indeed, Jacob considered this to be an act of Joseph's kindness and faithfulness to him. It is lovely to see Jacob ending his days with a vibrant faith, confident that the Lord would keep his word, and taking steps that indicated that faith to others. This was so different from those long years of depression and discouragement when he was parted from Joseph earlier in his life. Then Jacob asked Joseph to make this promise by placing his hand under his thigh. This was an ancient sign that someone was entering into covenant with someone to do what was being asked. Another example of this was when Abraham was seeking a wife for Isaac and he made his servant promise that he would go back to his own country and relatives to find a wife (Genesis 24:2ff). It is thought that this was an indication of their belief that God

was going to extend their family in future years, and here Jacob certainly believed that because of God's promise. This was Jacob's affirmation that one day through his family, and in the land of Canaan, would come One who would bring blessing to all nations, the Lord Jesus Christ himself, God's promised deliverer.

Believers today, of course, have before them the assurance of future blessing in the promise of heaven. Peter wrote in 1 Peter 1 there is a place '*...kept in heaven for us...*' In addition to that Peter went on to tell us in his second letter that one day, when Christ returns for us, all Christian believers will dwell with the Lord himself on a new earth (2 Peter 3:13): "*But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*" And as Jacob, Joseph and all the ancient people of God looked forward in faith to the coming of Christ, so believers today look forward in faith to Christ's second coming. The day has been assured to us by the Lord himself (John 14:2-3): "*In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*" And the apostle John describes the glory and blessing of that day for us in 1 John 3:2: "*But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.*" (See also 1 Corinthians 15:51-57; 1 Thessalonians 4:13 & 5:11.) What an encouragement for us as we consider the end of our earthly lives. Death is not the end of us, but for believers is actually the doorway into the Lord's great

blessings which he has prepared for all who love and follow him. In his presence there is fullness of joy (Psalm 16:11). Already there are millions of believers around the throne of God in heaven, many of whom we have known personally. They are absent from the body and absent from us, but they are present with the Lord. One day we too will join them if we know the love and grace of Christ in our lives and are trusting him to be our Saviour. Reader, as you consider the end of your own life, what does that make you think about? Are you able to view it with that confident faith that Jacob exercised in the future fulfilment of the promises of God? Are you able to see beyond the frailty, weakness and perhaps pain of your present life and look forward to being with Christ, which is far better? Those who truly follow the Lord Jesus Christ are assured of such future blessings, and therefore can gain great comfort as we view our own walk down the valley of the shadow of death. Like David in Psalm 23, we can do so without any fear for the Lord will be with us and guide us safely through to the place he has reserved for us.

Returning to Joseph, upon hearing his father's request, without any hesitation he agreed to keep his father's wishes. He declared in Genesis 47:30, "*I will do as you say.*" Jacob then put him on oath (Genesis 47:31): "*'Swear to me,' he said. Then Joseph swore to him, and Israel worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.*" (See also Hebrews 11:21.) Joseph's loyalty and loving care for his father is a delight to see, and the old man was able to worship God with thankfulness and faith.

Chapter 3 Genesis 48 – Joseph's Two Sons

When we turn to Genesis 48 it is obvious that we are nearing the time when Joseph's father Jacob was going to die. In the previous chapter Jacob had shown he was aware that his remaining time on earth was short, and he had asked Joseph to bury him back in Canaan, the land God had promised to his people. Precisely how much time passed between Jacob's conversation with Joseph and the beginning of Genesis 48 we are not told, but when Genesis 48 begins we read, "*Some time later...*" Joseph was sent for because his father was ill. This was evidently his final illness as in Genesis 49 we have the record of his death. So this was a very critical time for both Joseph and Jacob, and would have brought with it its own particular sadness. For Joseph it would have been very painful to see his own dear father coming to an end of his earthly pilgrimage, and although Joseph and Jacob knew he was going to be with the Lord, the pain of losing a loved one is nonetheless very difficult to have to endure. Because Jacob was aware of what was happening to him, he realised the time had come for him to do some urgent and necessary things before his death. Hence the details we have in this and the next chapter. There were things that needed to be done and said to his family before he took his final farewell.

I think we need to pause a little at that point and consider how valuable it can be to know that you are dying. That may sound a surprising thing to say, but there is great truth in it. It is helpful to know because we can prepare ourselves to meet the Lord. If you are a Christian believer such a period can be very precious indeed, as you meditate

on the Bible's teaching about heaven and being with Christ which will be far better than anything we have known on earth. It also gives you time to talk with your loved ones, to say your farewells, and to commit each other into the Lord's hands and loving care with confidence. It can be a valuable time to put matters right with others whom perhaps you have wronged or been estranged from, as once death has come you cannot come back to say sorry to someone you may have hurt, nor can you be reconciled to them. Even if you are a backslidden believer, then being aware that you are in your final days is a mercy from the Lord as he is giving you time to repent and come back to him and to seek his forgiving and restoring mercy. If you are a faithful follower of the Lord Jesus those final days can be days of opportunity to share the gospel of Christ with those close to you who are strangers to God's grace, yet in such need of it. When we are in the grave our tongues will remain silent and we shall have no more opportunity to tell others about the Saviour! And even if you are not a believer, knowing that you are dying can also be valuable because it stresses the urgency for you to put matters right between you and God, and mercifully gives you time to seek him through Christ before it is too late. **BEWARE**, do not be as foolish as those who sadly have thought they could put off seeking God's forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ until the end of their lives, but died suddenly and unexpectedly. For them they left it too late. So as I said earlier, knowing that you are dying can be a very valuable time.

Well, Jacob was in that position and so we turn to consider what took place between him and Joseph during those sad days.

1) Jacob adopts Joseph's two sons (v1-8).

When the news reached Joseph that his father was ill, he immediately went to see him, taking along his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. These had been born to Joseph while he was in Egypt during the time before he saw his father and after he had been promoted in the land to prime ministerial position (see Genesis 41:50-52). The scene is painted for us in some moving words (Genesis 48:2): *“When Jacob was told, ‘Your son Joseph has come to you,’ Israel rallied his strength and sat on the bed.”* We can picture the sight in our minds as this frail dying father and grandfather was cheered by the news Joseph was there to see him, and he musters up enough strength to sit and talk with them. It is a touching scene, and clearly Jacob was very ill and very weak.

It is interesting that he is called by the name *‘Israel’* in this verse, and that name is used throughout most of Genesis 48. *‘Israel’*, you remember, was the name God gave Jacob after he had wrestled with God all night in Genesis 32:22-32, and means ‘he struggles with God’. It was at that point that Jacob had acknowledged God as the source of every blessing and that he could not live without him, so he wrestled with the Lord and would not let him go unless he blessed him. He knew he needed the Lord. But what was even more important was that God acknowledged Jacob. Jacob was now his servant and so the Lord changed his

name to Israel because he would be the father of the nation that would bear that name.

Returning to Genesis 48 Jacob, or Israel as he was named, began to speak with Joseph about the Lord's gracious dealings with him (Genesis 48:3): *“Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me and said to me, ‘I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.’”*” Incidentally, Luz is better known by the name Bethel (Genesis 28:19) because this is what Jacob called it after this experience of God's grace. Bethel means ‘house of God’ and Jacob knew the Lord had met with him there. So Jacob took Joseph back to that period in his life. The first occasion of note was when he dreamt about a stairway going from earth to heaven with the angels of God ascending and descending on it, and which is recorded for us in Genesis 28:10 onwards. Then there was a second occasion in Genesis 35:6-13 where he built an altar to the Lord and when the Lord appeared to him again. On both occasions God made these great promises to Jacob about the increase of his descendants and their possession of the land of Canaan, something which Jacob did not doubt at all, and which was to influence what he did in what follows in this chapter. How good it was of Jacob to talk of God during his final hours. What a profound effect for good this must have had not only on Joseph but also on his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

It is important also to note the name he used for God – God Almighty – El Shaddai. The God with whom all things are possible. The God whose power knows no limits. The God for whom nothing is too hard. The God, to use John’s words in Revelation 19:6, who is the omnipotent One who reigns forever and ever. Though Israel’s own strength was failing rapidly, he knew he and all his family were in the hands of the God whose strength never weakens, tires nor fails. Dying Israel’s faith was shining brightly as he neared the end of his life, and he knew he would be with the Lord before too long.

It was at this point that Jacob tells Joseph that he was going to regard his two sons as his own children (v5). Ephraim and Manasseh would be just like Jacob’s own sons Reuben and Simeon. He was, in effect, adopting them as his own children. In fact, Ephraim and Manasseh would supersede Reuben and Simeon, and even though Ephraim was the younger, he was going to be given the birthright that normally would have been given to Reuben. The reason for this was that Reuben had forfeited this right because of his previous moral sin (Genesis 35:22 and see also 1 Chronicles 5:1-2). So from that point onwards all Joseph’s other children would share the inheritance that would come to Ephraim and Manasseh. Jacob then reminded Joseph how his own mother Rachel had died while they were on the road to Bethlehem (v7), something which Jacob remembered with considerable sorrow. Some Bible commentators think his adopting of Ephraim and Manasseh was in the place of other sons Rachel may have had if she had lived longer.

2) Jacob blesses Joseph’s two sons (v9-22).

At this point in time Israel, whose eyesight was failing (v10), saw Joseph’s sons and asked who they were. Ephraim and Manasseh would have been around the ages of seventeen or eighteen by this time. Joseph immediately identified them as his own sons, and did so in this very important way (v9), *“They are the sons God has given me here...”* Joseph acknowledged the intervention and control and goodness of God in every part of his life, and his sons were no exception, they were God’s gift to him. Then Israel asked for them to be brought near him so he could bless them. The old man could hardly see at this time because of his great age, and so he kissed the boys and hugged them. It was a very moving scene. Israel, like his son Joseph, was so conscious that his own life had been in the gracious and wise hands of Almighty God, and was so aware that that precise moment was also a blessing from God (Genesis 48:11): *“Israel said to Joseph, ‘I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too.’”*

It is so delightful to see the way that they talked about the Lord so naturally in their family life. Sadly there are many homes where the Lord is never talked about, and where his goodness is never acknowledged, and Israel is a challenge to us to speak of God in our own families. Then Joseph removed his sons from between his father’s knees (v12), bowed to the ground, and then placed Ephraim, the youngest, in front of Israel’s left hand and Manasseh in front of his right hand. But Israel reached out his right hand and placed it on Ephraim’s head and his left on

Manasseh's (v14). Normally the eldest would have been marked out by the right hand being placed on him, but on this occasion it was the youngest, Ephraim, who received this distinction. Then Israel, acting as a prophet of the Lord, blessed Joseph through the two lads (Genesis 48:15-16): *"May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel who has delivered me from all harm – may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."* Again Israel took opportunity to speak of the goodness of God to him. God had been his shepherd throughout his life, leading, guiding, providing, protecting, caring, rescuing, and redeeming him. (This is the first of many more references to God being the Shepherd of his people. See also Psalm 23; 80:1; Isaiah 40:11; John 10:11; Hebrews 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25) He emphasised that God had been the Angel who delivered him from all harm. God's eye had been upon him in all that had happened in his life and saved him. Full of gratitude and aware of the necessity of the grace of God, he called upon the Lord to bless his grandsons even as he had blessed him, and Abraham and Isaac, seeking God to multiply them greatly. Remember the greatest thing we could ever wish for our children or grandchildren is that they may know the grace of God in their lives, for without him they will perish and their lives will come to nothing. Note also that he spoke of Abraham and Isaac as walking before the Lord. He was simply declaring their personal, real and intimate knowledge of

God. They loved God, believed God, obeyed God, and communed with God. Their godly life was deep and genuine, and he longed that his grandsons would also walk with God. We are reminded here that God's blessings do not come to us automatically. Having godly parents and grandparents and great grandparents does not automatically bring us the blessing and salvation of God. There is that need for us to walk before the Lord ourselves, and this was Jacob's longing for Joseph's two sons.

Joseph intervened at this point and tried to make his father change his hands around so that the blessing of the firstborn would come upon Manasseh, his eldest son. Indeed, he almost scolded his father by saying (v18), *"No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."* But Israel refused, and declared he knew fully which of the lads was the oldest and that he knew what he had done. He knew that Manasseh would become great, but that Ephraim would become greater (v19). The Lord had clearly given Israel an insight into his future purposes for these two lads, and he spoke accordingly. Then Israel declared in v20, *"In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.'"* So the younger was placed before the older. From this we learn that God's purposes are sometimes the very opposite to what we would think or even desire, but we must be willing to submit to him and accept his good and wise will as being both right and best. Matthew Henry wrote: *"He often gives most to those that are least likely. He chooses the weak things of the world; raises the poor*

out of the dust.” God is absolutely sovereign on whom he bestows his grace and mercies (see Romans 9:15).

Then Israel assured Joseph (v21) that although he was about to die, God would be with him, and bring him back to the land he had promised them. Old Israel, full of assured faith, urged Joseph not to forget or lose sight of what God had promised concerning the future, because it was sure and certain. This is why we read in Hebrews 11:21, *“By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph’s sons, and worshipped as he leaned on the top of his staff.”* Although Jacob’s eyes were dim he had learned to walk by faith and not by sight, and these final actions demonstrate the truth of his trust in the Lord. Matthew Henry wrote: *“This assurance was given them, and carefully preserved among them, that they might neither love Egypt too much when it favoured them, nor fear it too much when it frowned on them.”* In a similar way, Christian believers today need to keep before them the promised inheritance that God has stored up for us. Our future is not dark nor uncertain, but glorious and sure (1 Peter 1:3-5): *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”* Promises such as this and the many others in Scripture help us not to hold on to this world too tightly, and also not to be too disturbed when it opposes us, because the best is yet

to be. A day is coming for us when (Revelation 21:3-4), *“...the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”* The Lord Jesus Christ will come again for every one of his followers and so we shall be with the Lord forever.

Israel then promised Joseph a portion of the land of Canaan that he had obtained, and which is also referred to in John 4:5, *“So he (i.e. Jesus) came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph.”* God did give what he had promised, and he will continue to do so.

Chapter 4 Genesis 49 (especially v22ff) – Jacob’s Blessing On Joseph

As Joseph’s father Jacob came to the very end of his life he called for his sons to gather round him (Genesis 49:1). Jacob’s words indicate to us that he was acting as the Lord’s prophet at this time because he said this to his sons, *“Gather round so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.”* The Lord had given his very elderly servant a glimpse of his sovereign purposes for each of Jacob’s sons, and so before he died Jacob made this known to them. This passage of the Bible is often referred to as Jacob’s blessings on his sons, but that implies that all of them would have a prosperous and happy future, which was certainly not what Jacob said to some of them. For

example, his words to his eldest son Reuben were very solemn indeed (Genesis 49:3-4): *“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honour, excelling in power. Turbulent as waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up on your father’s bed, onto my couch and defiled it.”* A look further on in the Bible in Judges 5:15-16 indicates that the Reubenites became very indecisive rather than dominant leaders. And Jacob actually cursed the anger of Simeon and Levi (Genesis 49:7): *“Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.”* And that is exactly what happened as Simeon’s descendants were absorbed into the territory of Judah (Joshua 19:1 & 9), and Levi’s sons were equally dispersed throughout the land, living in a number of cities that had been allocated for them (see Numbers 35:2 & 7; Joshua 14:4 and 21:41). But our concern is particularly with Jacob’s words about Joseph, and these clearly were words of blessing, as well as of insight and instruction and spiritual desire. Using symbolic picture language Jacob very graphically described what Joseph’s family line would be like in Genesis 49:22ff. The Lord had clearly given old Jacob considerable discernment concerning Joseph and his descendants.

1) Joseph’s fruitfulness (v22).

Jacob said in Genesis 49:22, *“Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring whose branches climb over a wall.”* The picture Jacob painted with those words is quite easy to imagine in our minds. A luscious and vigorously healthy vine, planted near a spring of refreshing and life

sustaining water, that grew considerably until it extended beyond the boundaries of the garden where it was planted. This is the first of many Bible references that uses the vine as a picture of the people of God. In the Old Testament this was symbolic of Israel, the chosen people of God (Isaiah 5:1ff), and in the New Testament Jesus used it to describe himself and his followers who are joined to him as branches are joined to a vine (John 15). Here Jacob used it to describe the fruitfulness of Joseph’s family in coming days.

You may recall that Joseph called one of his sons who had been born to him in Egypt, Ephraim. That name is very similar to the word for fruitful used in Genesis 49, and indeed this was why Joseph gave it to his son (Genesis 41:52): *“The second son he named Ephraim and said, ‘It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering.’”* You will remember that Jacob had declared that Ephraim would be greater than his older brother Manasseh (Genesis 48:19). And it was exactly as Jacob declared because in Joshua 17 we find Ephraim’s descendants expanding their territory (Joshua 17:14-15): *“The people of Joseph said to Joshua, ‘Why have you given us only one allotment and one portion for an inheritance? We are numerous people and the Lord has blessed us abundantly.’ ‘If you are so numerous,’ Joshua answered, ‘and if the hill country of Ephraim is too small for you, go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves there in the land of the Perizzites and Rephaites.’”*

Now we might think at first that these details are all very interesting and historical, but have little to teach us about

spiritual matters, but we would be quite wrong to make that assessment. What we see in these practical details is that the Word of God is absolutely true, and that what God has declared will happen, actually will take place. The Bible is utterly dependable because God is utterly dependable. He is a faithful God, who always keeps his promises, and whom no one can hinder. And that is a tremendously reassuring truth to grasp, as well as one that is very solemn.

- It is solemn as far as unbelievers are concerned, those who do not follow the Lord Jesus Christ. God has promised in the Bible that all unbelievers will come under his judgement unless they repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ – and because God has said it, that judgment is certain. One of the most severe Bible passages that describe this is found in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10, *“This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power...”* These are words we cannot take lightly or ignore, because they are God’s words and will be fulfilled. Therefore if you have never turned to the Lord Jesus to forgive you your sins then you need to do so with some urgency before it is too late. Remember, all that God has said to us in the Bible is true!
- Alongside that solemn aspect is the very opposite. This is the joyful and glorious fact that God will also keep all the promises he has given to bless his faithful followers.

The great promises he has given us about every believer’s future are all absolutely true. We will enjoy God’s presence with us always through our future lives on earth and then beyond the grave for ever (Hebrews 13:5-6): *“...God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’ So we say with confidence, ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?’”* We will be given a place in heaven (John 14:1-3): *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. And I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.”* We will be kept safe by the almighty power of God to ensure that each believer does reach heaven safely (1 Peter 1:3-5): *“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.”* We will see our Saviour and be like him (1 John 3:2): *“Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.”* These are most comforting and reassuring promises that God has given to Christian believers and which God will fulfil. They

both encourage us as we often go through difficulties because they mean these trials will not last forever, and they stimulate us to live pure and holy lives in preparation for our glorious future in the presence of Christ.

And the God who promised Joseph that his family would flourish, and who kept his promise, is also the God who gives the promises of his judgement to unbelievers and his blessing to Christ's followers.

The Lord had already begun to do this even before Joseph heard these words from his father, for he already had two sons born to him in Egypt, Ephraim, whom we've already mentioned, and Manasseh, and more were to come in future years. Therefore we must take God's promises of judgement and blessing seriously and respond to them with humble obedience and faith if we are to benefit our souls, escape hell and enjoy heaven.

2) Joseph's trials (v23).

The honesty and faithfulness of the Bible, the Word of God, is also seen in that it describes the difficulties and problems that face even believers. These are not glossed over. There are many today who like to think that by becoming a Christian believer all their problems and difficulties will be over and they will never be troubled again. But that is not what God has said in the Bible. Indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ warned his disciples in John 16:33: "***In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.***" God's children have to face difficult experiences just as unbelievers do, and this is what Jacob said about Joseph next.

(Genesis 49:23) "*With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility.*" Again old Jacob paints a graphic picture with words. One can easily picture in our minds arrows flying through the air with force, deliberately aimed at their target with intention to injure and kill. These are very strong words, but they remind us that often the people of God are called to go through severe trials that are painful and even extreme. Many today face persecution simply because they are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ. Some even today are in prison for their faith, others are being tortured for it, and still others have had to lay down their very lives for being a follower of Christ. They have been faithful unto death! And Jacob declared that Joseph and his family would know the animosity of others against them. His use of the term '*archers*', Matthew Henry tells us, speaks of those skilful in doing mischief and masters in the art of persecution. We have already seen that Joseph had known much of this in his life. Hated by his brothers, attacked by them, sold into slavery in Egypt, wrongly imprisoned and left there for years – that whole period spanned thirteen years of his life! Jacob declared that down the long history of Joseph's family line his descendants would face much hostility and conflict. And if we are believers in the Lord Jesus Christ this is a reminder that we too face enemies. There is the sinful opposition we find in the world around us (1 John 2:15-16). There is the hostility and animosity of the devil who goes about like a roaring lion seeking to devour us (1 Peter 5:8). There is our own inner weakness and tendency to yield to temptation and sin (Romans 7:17-20). All of these things

have to be fought against. And this is a spiritual battle as Paul reminds us in Ephesians 6:10ff, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the whole armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”* So although such hostility is unpleasant and difficult and not easy to encounter, we still have to face it, and should not be overcome or crushed with surprise when such hostilities arise. But unless this sounds discouraging Jacob was also able to speak of something else concerning Joseph.

3) Joseph’s strength (v24-25).

Joseph did not face his trials alone, neither would his descendants, and neither will Christian believers. The Lord was with him, as he will be with us. And again Jacob’s words are full of graphic illustrations (Genesis 49:24-25): *“But his bow remained steady, his strong arm stayed supple, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb.”*

When we ask, ‘How could Joseph endure such hostility?’ the answer comes. ‘Because God was with him!’ Joseph was able to stand firm like a mighty warrior against all the onslaughts he endured, and did not give in or cave in under the pressure, and through all his trials he remained faithful

to God and persevered. This is tremendously encouraging, because having to face hostility, from whatever source, is one of the most testing and arduous situations we can face as believers. It puts great pressure on us to forsake the Lord or to grumble against him and even to despair. But here we read of Joseph being able to stand against all that was thrown at him by those who hated and despised him. And what is particularly helpful is that this strength and ability was not something Joseph possessed naturally. He was just like us, and knew fear and weakness and alarm and discouragement. (See Genesis 42:21 as an example.) His secret lay not in himself, but in the Lord his God. It was God who came to the aid of his sorely tried servant, and to encourage and instruct us Jacob uses one description of God after another, to pile truth upon truth about God’s character and his relationship to his children. He describes God as:

- i. The Mighty One of Jacob – the one who saves and redeems his people (see Isaiah 49:26).
- ii. The Shepherd – the loving and caring and tender and concerned leader of his people, who leads and guides and protects and feeds his sheep.
- iii. The Rock of Israel – the one who is immovable, solid, sure and certain, and therefore the sure defender of his people, the Rock of defence to save them (see Psalm 18:2).
- iv. Your father’s God, who helps you – the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who loves to draw near to his people when they are in trouble to aid and assist

them, and not one who deserts his people at such times nor treats them at arm's length.

- v. The Almighty – the invincible One, the One with all power, and for whom nothing is too hard and no opponents too strong, and therefore the great deliverer and strengthener of his people.

It is the Lord who was with Joseph and stood by him and upheld him and empowered him. As Joseph drew near to God so God drew near to Joseph and kept him. The great God of heaven blessed Joseph and his family with blessings from the heavens above and the deep below, rain and springs of water brought great fertility to their soil. And God added blessings to his family. The blessings of the breast and womb refer to the fertility of man and animals alike. God had blessed Joseph, and would continue to do so for his descendants down the centuries. Many centuries after Jacob pronounced these words to Joseph, the prophet Hosea was able to write about Joseph's descendants, the tribe of Ephraim, that they had become very rich and wealthy (Hosea 12:8). God had again kept his Word.

All of this teaches us the vital lesson that we are not to rely on our own strength and abilities but on the Lord alone to see us through life's perils and dangers. Because the human heart has a great tendency to be proud, the temptation is that we think we can stand in our own strength. But one hymn writer has so accurately expressed the truth with these words, *'the arm of flesh will fail you, you dare not trust your own.'* Joseph depended on the

Lord and the Lord upheld him, and we must do the same and the Lord will uphold us.

There is a salutary lesson we need to take heed of at this point. As the centuries passed the Lord blessed Joseph's descendants, and they became rich and wealthy. Then they forgot God and turned away from him and thought they could disregard God and disobey God with impunity. They were very mistaken, as the Lord came and judged them as the book of Hosea points out to us in Hosea 4:17 and 5:3ff. So we need to be careful and watch our hearts to ensure whether we are facing great trials, or are experiencing a time of great prosperity, that we never forget the Lord our God who alone is our helper and the source of all our blessings. As Joseph trusted the Lord, and as his family did so in the early years, the Lord blessed and helped them.

4) Joseph's blessings (v26).

Jacob closed his words with the great desire that the God who had blessed him might also bless his son. God had blessed Jacob abundantly, and now he wanted these blessings to rest on Joseph (Genesis 49:26): *"Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers."* How faithfully God had preserved his family of seventy as they went down to Egypt, and how wonderfully God granted the desire of Jacob for Joseph as in the years that followed his family grew and increased. Ephraim especially gained the ascendancy over the other northern tribes as seen in Joshua 16:5-9 and Isaiah 7:1-2. In Hosea 13:1 we read, *"When Ephraim spoke, men*

trembled; he was exalted in Israel.” Jacob also described Joseph as a prince among his brothers, and how true that was. Not only was he pre-eminent in the sense of his high position in the land of Egypt, but also in his godliness. And so it was that the Lord graciously upheld, sustained, preserved and prospered Joseph.

There are great parallels here between God’s blessing on Joseph and the blessings he has promised the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, God’s people, when we reach glory. Paul spoke of a crown of glory awaiting him there in 2 Timothy 4:8, and for all who look forward to Christ’s coming again. Jesus spoke of us sharing with him on his throne in Revelation 3:21. And these are blessings which last forever, and which have been purchased for us by the Lord Jesus Christ through his death on the cross and are his ‘plenteous redemption’ as a Christian hymn writer has put it. The great question is, dear reader, is this redemption in Christ something that you have? We must remember that the blessings of heaven belong only to those who follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5 Genesis 49:29-50:14 – Joseph’s father dies

Throughout our studies in the Life of Joseph we have learned much about this man, and much more about the Lord his God. Joseph was a man who had evidently walked with God over many years. His trials and tribulations had matured him spiritually, and the Lord had clearly gifted him with a wise heart and mind. Joseph was a man God knew he could trust with great responsibility, and after thirteen years of preparation during which he

suffered one hardship after another, Joseph was ready to be used by God in high position. We have seen how he rose to become the second in command of all Egypt, second only to Pharaoh. Through Joseph’s careful and diligent work thousands and thousands had been saved from certain death by starvation during seven terrible years of famine. And in his personal life, Joseph was a godly man. It has been most significant to see how wisely and graciously he dealt with his brothers. After they had treated him despicably, he sought opportunity to forgive them and be reconciled with them, and he bore them no grudge at all. His spirituality was immense, and his heart was full of the grace of God. In a very real way he displayed that love which is seen in its fullest expression in the Lord Jesus Christ who delights to forgive and forgive and forgive again all who turn to him in true repentance.

Seventeen years had now passed since Joseph had been reunited with his father Jacob and his brothers (see Genesis 47:28). Throughout the period Joseph remained in the service of Pharaoh in Egypt although the Bible is silent as to the details of his precise work during this time. No doubt these seventeen years had been very happy ones during which the family must have spent many hours together. The evident blessing of God was upon them all, preserving them and meeting their needs as he fulfilled his purposes for them. But now the time had drawn near for Joseph’s father Jacob to die. And before we look at the details, this brings an important lesson before us, that even the godly suffer death and bereavement, and godly Joseph was not exempt from deep sorrow and loss just because he

was righteous. He too had to feel the pain and distress of losing one he loved very much. And this is important to note because Jacob's death was not an indication that God was displeased with Joseph or his family. Death and bereavement are things believers share with the rest of the world, because we live in a world that has fallen into sin, and we are not taken out of it the moment we turn to God. I mention this because there are many today who teach that if things go wrong in the life of a Christian believer and you face great trial or sorrow, then it is always a sign that God is angry with you. **This is quite wrong teaching and has no biblical warrant at all.** Joseph was living a godly life, yet he suffered the loss of his father. There is no record at all that this happened because God was angry or displeased with Joseph, nor is there any record of God rebuking Joseph of some sin, small or great. It was something that naturally happened, and teaches us that the godly do go through sad losses which are normal to our living in a sinful world.

Now we do need to be very careful here, because the Bible does indicate that there are times when God does bring difficulties to us when we sin and fail to repent. If we persist in disobedience to God then he will chasten us. Hebrews 12 makes that very clear. We also have the sad incident of Ananias and Sapphira who lied to the Holy Spirit in Acts 5 and who, as a result, died under the judgement of God. Then there was the tragic state of affairs in the Church at Corinth concerning those who were coming to the Lord's table in a most ungodly manner. Paul tells in 1 Corinthians 11:30 *"That is why many among you*

are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep." In other words, weakness, illness and premature death had come to some of the members of the Corinthian Church because of their persistent sinfulness. The Lord was chastening them to make them realise he was displeased with their sinful behaviour, and Paul wrote not only to rebuke them but to correct the sin they had fallen into. **BUT** this is not always the case. Trial and sadness do not always come to us because we have been guilty of some great sin. Indeed, trial and distress can come to us because we are serving God and obeying him. We must not forget the words of Jesus in John 16:33: *"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world."* Therefore it is very wrong for some to teach that all trials in the believer's life come because God is angry with us, and they are also very unkind to say so as this only increases the distress of those suffering. We need to be very discerning when we go through trials ourselves to examine our hearts to ensure this is not because God is displeased with us. And we also need that discernment when we hear of other believers in distress to keep us from jumping to quick conclusions and unjustly accusing them of wrongdoing. Joseph had to suffer sadness and bereavement even though he was living a godly life that was pleasing to the Lord.

1) Jacob dies (Genesis 49:29-33).

There are a number of details given to us in these verses that might at first seem insignificant as Jacob outlined the

precise place where he wanted to be buried, but they tell us about the great faith of Jacob at this critical time in his life.

a. Jacob's faith expressed in the way he described his death (v29).

Jacob had become aware that the time for him to die had now arrived. Precisely how this had come about we are not told. Remember Jacob had already reached the great age of 130 years when he first went to Egypt (Genesis 47:9), and we are told that he lived in Egypt for a further seventeen years (Genesis 47:28), so that would make him 147 years old! And undoubtedly as his physical strength waned he became more and more aware that his time on earth was fast coming to its conclusion. We know from Genesis 48:1 that Jacob had been ill, and now we are simply told that he was aware that death now approached him. I wonder how you would feel if you knew that your time to die had come today? Would you be afraid? Would you panic? Or would you be at peace about it? As we look at Jacob we have to say that he was very much at peace over the matter. There is no record of him becoming anxious or at all afraid. And instead he was able to speak about death in a lovely way that displayed his faith was absolutely strong and vibrant (v27): *"I am about to be gathered to my people."* The very same description is found earlier in Genesis 25:8 regarding the death of Abraham, that he, too, was gathered to his people. (See also 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chronicles 34:28.) Jacob, as child of God and a man of faith, just like Abraham, knew that death was not the end of him. Neither had death meant the annihilation of his people who had already died, for they

still existed. He knew he would go to that place his own people had already gone to. He would be with them! While it is true that Jacob probably did not have as much awareness as we do about what awaits believers when they die, simply because much of the Bible had not been given by God during his time, yet nonetheless he was aware that death was not the end. He knew there was life after death, and he would go to be with his father Isaac and grandfather Abraham, who were both men of faith and who were now with the Lord. There was this certain and calm confidence in his heart that this is what the Lord was now going to do for him. He was not afraid to meet God, nor fearful that death might be the end of him. He just portrayed this marvellous peace and assurance, and which he expressed in those words, *"I am about to be gathered to my people."*

Jacob's faith was very much like that of Job who spoke so confidently about his own relationship with God and with calm assurance over his own death. Job, we need to remember, lived during a similar period of time to Jacob and the other Old Testament patriarchs. This is what Job declared in Job 19:25-27: *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes – I, not another. How my heart yearns within me!"* Job knew that when his skin had been destroyed, that is after his death, that he would still see God! This is a tremendous comfort, and was something that Joseph's own father Jacob expressed as he sat on his own death bed. How this must have been an encouragement to Joseph and to all who gathered around

him at this time. Here was a man whom they loved dearly expressing the reality of God's grace to him, who, having pardoned him, had given him the assurance that at death he would be safely brought to his side in heaven. It was also a tremendous witness to any who were doubting or even unbelieving. God was very real to Jacob and God had given him this blessed hope.

It is as the history of the Bible unfolds that we are told why Jacob and others like him could have such assurance in the face of death. It was because the Lord Jesus Christ, who, through his own death on the cross of Calvary, fully paid the price of every believer's sin by suffering in their place, and thereby overcame death. Consider how it has been summarised in these lovely words from Hebrews 2:14-18: *"Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity (ie. Jesus) so that by his death he might destroy him who has the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."* This is why every Christian believer is secure and although we will have to face dying, unless Jesus comes back before that time, nonetheless we have no need to be afraid because the Lord has overcome death for us. And the New Testament is full of so many promises and descriptions of

heaven to give us further encouragement, and here are a small selection of these.

(John 14:2) Jesus said, *"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."*

(2 Corinthians 5:1) *"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands."*

(2 Corinthians 5:6-8) *"Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord."*

Then we have the great longing of the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:23: *"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far..."* (See also 1 Peter 1:3-5; 1 John 2:28-3:3 etc.)

The great question these verses and also Jacob's words challenge us with is, 'Are we ready to die with such assurance?' The way to be able to say an assured 'yes' to that question is to be sure that you have asked Christ to forgive you for your own wrong doings and to give you the gift of eternal life (Romans 6:23): *"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Jesus Christ our Lord."* (John 3:16) *"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* Therefore it is to the Lord Jesus Christ we must turn and trust in and we too will then be secure for time and for eternity beyond.

b. Jacob's faith expressed in his instructions about his burial (v29b-32).

In Genesis 49:29b-32 Jacob said, *“Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and their I buried Leah. The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”* At first sight these verses simply indicate to us the mere practicalities regarding the site in which Jacob had chosen to be buried. He had already prepared a grave for himself (Genesis 50:5) having dug it out of the ground, and this is where he wanted his body to lay until the day of resurrection when Christ returns. But we need to realise more is being stated here than the mere geographical details of the precise burial site. In these arrangements Jacob was expressing his absolute assurance that God was going to give that part of the world to his people. The land of Canaan would eventually become the land of Israel. God had promised this to his grandfather Abraham (Genesis 13:14-18; 15:1-21), and Jacob did not doubt it, but was assured that this land would one day be theirs. And although he himself would not enter into this as it would not take place until the days of Joshua, yet nonetheless he did not doubt it at all. He knew God always kept his word, and in his dying moments he gives testimony to this fact and thereby was directing his family and all who heard him to trust in the Lord for the days that lay ahead. God would not forsake them, nor

forget or abandon his promises for them; therefore they were to trust him with all their hearts.

c. Jacob Dies (v33).

Having giving his instructions we are told Jacob *‘...drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.’* What Jacob in faith believed God would do for him was fulfilled, he was gathered to his people, free from all the weaknesses and frailty and possible pains of old age, and with the Lord. His faith and trust in God had not been misplaced. His declaration to his sons as to where he knew he was going was not just wishful thinking, but was brought to completion. Romans 10:11 tells us that, *“Anyone who trusts in the Lord will never be put to shame.”* (See also Isaiah 28:16.) The Lord never ever fails those who trust him, and Jacob was brought safely to heaven to await that glorious day of resurrection when Christ will return, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

2) Joseph mourns for his father (Genesis 50:1-14).

a. His initial grief (v1).

Although it is true that believers do not mourn as those who have no hope (1 Thessalonians 4:13) that does not mean that believers do not mourn at all, and Joseph was no exception. Also, although believers do mourn over the loss of loved ones they do not do so with despair. If we belong to Christ then we know we'll one day be reunited with all others who belong to Christ, and we'll join our loved ones around the throne of God in heaven and be with Lord forever. That fact is a great comfort and source of

consolation for Christian believers when another believer we love dies. We can look forward to being with them again. Not only that, it is a great comfort to us to know that because our believing loved ones are now with the Lord we know they are free from all pain and suffering and sorrow. Sin and temptation will trouble them no more. Satan will not be able to attack them or assail them with doubts and fears in that place of purity and peace, and where at God's right hand there are pleasures forever more. But having said all that, we still miss them immensely when they die. We no longer have their presence with us. We can no longer talk with them or pray with them or seek their advice and guidance and help. The loss we can feel at such times can be immense. And this is heightened when it is a member of our own family, perhaps our husband or wife, or children, or as in this case one of our parents. And Joseph had just lost his father Jacob whom he loved dearly. Therefore we find him distraught (Genesis 50:1): "*Joseph threw himself upon his father and wept over him and kissed him.*" The love and respect he had for his father was real and deep, and such was the tenderness and pain he felt in his heart that he wept. He cried, and that was not wrong. We read in John 11:35 that "*Jesus wept*" and this also was because his dear friend Lazarus had died. In a last token of his love and affection for his father Joseph kisses his dead lips. The scene is a very moving picture, and we are introduced to the tender side of Joseph's heart, and we must be thankful to God that this has not been hidden from us. This man of great spiritual strength and of great administrative and leadership skills had a heart that was

tender and vulnerable, just like ours. Today you may find yourself or know of someone in this same sad situation, then remember it is not wrong to mourn, and we should do all we can to comfort and support those who are bereaved. How good to know that we have a gracious God and loving heavenly Father and a merciful Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, to whom we can turn at such times. (See Hebrews 4:14-16.) Unbelievers are devoid of all such comfort and are strangers to God and have to face death and bereavement without any hope, and really in despair, but not so for the children of God. But still the children of God mourn and grieve when their loved ones are taken.

b. Joseph's careful obedience (v2-13).

In obedience to his father's request Joseph prepared to take his father's body back to Canaan for burial. We are told that he ordered his father's corpse to be embalmed. This was as a preparation for the journey to Canaan, and this took forty days (v3). We are told that the grief over Jacob's death was also shared by the Egyptians who mourned for him for seventy days (v3). This was a further indication of how Jacob had endeared himself to them, and also their continued high esteem for Joseph. The impact of this godly family on the nation must have been considerable to have had such a widespread effect, and we are reminded that often our lives influence those we live amongst to a powerful degree. Therefore how careful we need to be to ensure that influence is a good and godly one! Then Joseph requested Pharaoh's court to ask Pharaoh for leave of absence to bury his father (v4-5). It is interesting to note how Joseph never forsook his responsibilities in the

service of Pharaoh and always afforded him the proper respect. He did not just go off on his own but courteously sought Pharaoh's permission. Compare how Paul instructs us to honour those in authority over us in this world in Romans 13 and other places. And Pharaoh granted him his permission immediately (v6). Then Jacob's body was taken to Canaan (v7ff). A great procession accompanied the body, including Pharaoh's officials, with court dignitaries, and all Joseph's brothers and those belonging to Jacob's household. The scene must have been very impressive to watch as chariots and horsemen accompanied the solemn procession. Only the children and animals remained behind in Egypt. As they reached the threshing floor of Atad (v10) they wept and lamented again for a further seven days. Evidently their hearts were broken at the loss of this dear man of God, and even the Canaanite inhabitants who witnessed this remarked about this great scene and named the place Abel-Mizraim, which means 'mourning of the Egyptians' in memory of what took place (v11). Then Joseph and his brothers faithfully carried the body of their beloved father to the burial site in the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre just as their father had requested (v12). The scene is again one that is very moving and intimate and we can only imagine the sorrow each of Jacob's grieving sons felt. Then they made the long journey back (v14).

Application.

All that we have seen in this incident reminds us how solemn a thing death is, even the death of a believer, and should never be taken lightly. We sadly live in a world

that so often does not want to face up to the issues of death and the judgement to follow. We see this in the way that death is so often spoken of in hushed whispers, as if people were afraid to face it, or it is made fun of in jokes because again so many do not want to face up to its implications. But we are foolish in the extreme if we fail to prepare for death. It is the one thing that is certain in life and we cannot escape it. Even for the believer it is a dark valley experience, but the believer is not alone even at such times for the Lord will be with us, as David testified to in Psalm 23. The point is, are you ready to meet death and then to face the judgement of God? (See Hebrews 9:27.) Do you know that God will not hold your sin against you on that day because your sins have been forgiven by the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you turned to him in humble repentance and faith and asked him for mercy? Only if you follow Christ can you be ready to face death and all that lies beyond it. Without Christ you will face death alone, God's judgement alone, and be cast into hell forever. Therefore, do not delay a second longer but turn to the Saviour and seek his forgiveness for all that you have done wrong, and he will abundantly pardon you. Then you too will be able to face death with the same confidence which characterised Jacob, because you will know you are in the Lord's hands and therefore will never perish.

Chapter 6 Genesis 50:15-21 – Joseph Reassures His Brothers

Fearfulness is a very common complaint that afflicts all kinds of people in all sorts of situations. For example, you

might be fearful about a visit to the doctor, or the operation you are to have in the hospital. Some people are fearful about flying, while others are fearful that they may lose their job. Others are fearful about crossing the road in busy streets, others are fearful of war or famine or earthquakes or floods. There is probably no one on earth who has never felt fearful at some time or other. And sometimes those fears have been fully justified and with good reason, while at other times the fears we experience have little basis in them at all. My grandmother had always cooked her meals over a fire, and when her children bought her a gas oven to make life easier she was afraid to light it because she feared it would explode. She never did use that cooker and it was eventually sold. And what we can experience over the concerns of ordinary events in our daily lives can also be true in the spiritual realm. There are some people who fear that they are too sinful for God to forgive them, even though God has already forgiven Paul who described himself as the chief, the very worst of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). Others are afraid to come to God in prayer lest he reject them completely, even though Jesus has told us that whoever comes to him he will never drive away (John 6:37). But there is one fear that those who have already come to God in prayer, and who have known his forgiveness through the Lord Jesus Christ can still have. Namely, they can fear that perhaps God will still reject them in the end. Now you may be tempted to think, “Well, that’s absurd! Of course he won’t do something like that to those who have repented of their sin and trusted in him.” And of course you would be right, but that does not alter

the fact that some of the Lord’s dear children still suffer with this fear. It is very real to them.

The reasons for it can vary from believer to believer. For some it can come as a result of illness that has left them in very low spirits, perhaps even deeply depressed. At such times all can look dark and gloomy, and an unhealthy introspection can be devastating. For many it can be put down to a direct attack of Satan to try to rob them of their joy in the Lord, and to distress them as much as he can. He is after all the destroyer and the accuser of the brethren. Remember also, Satan will often attack believers when they are in low spirits. On other occasions it can be as a result of a period of backsliding, and the believer who knows he or she has wandered from the Lord and forsaken him for a while and indulged in past sins, can feel that God would never want them back again. And it can be simply a severe case of doubt and unbelief that makes the believer fearful concerning the Lord’s continued acceptance of him. It is with these things in mind that we turn to Genesis 50:15-21, where a very similar state of fearfulness is presented to us in the life of Joseph.

1) The fearfulness of Joseph’s brothers (v15-17a).

a. Their fear (v15).

Remember the earlier verses of Genesis 50 records for us the burial of Jacob, Joseph’s father. It had been a very solemn, moving and emotional time for all of the family as they had journeyed from Egypt to the burial site in Canaan, and then had the long trek back to Egypt. We must say that times of bereavement are always difficult and often leave us open to all sorts of things as our minds go over our

relationship with the one who has died. For example, we might wish we had spent more time with them, or had been more tolerant of their little habits. We might wish we had not been so short tempered with them, or had not been unkind. We might wonder how we are going to manage without their help, and so on. And it was this kind of thing that happened to Joseph's brothers (Genesis 50:15): "*When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, 'What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?'*" Whether this was something they had talked about on the journey back from Canaan, or whether it was something that just came over them when they returned to Egypt, we are not told. What is evident is that as they thought of their beloved father Jacob no longer being with them to help and advise and guide them, their minds went back to those earlier sins against Joseph, by this time around forty years previously, and they became afraid. They were fearful that now that Jacob was out of the way, so to speak, without his restraining influence, Joseph would wreak his revenge on them at last. Indeed they actually said, "*What if Joseph holds a grudge against us...*" They seemed to have completely forgotten Joseph's forgiveness expressed when he eventually revealed himself to them seventeen years earlier (Genesis 45). Their fearfulness was very real indeed, and not just a figment of their imagination or a mere passing thought that soon went away. It was a real fear.

However, even in this there is something positive from a spiritual point of view, and it is that these men had truly

come to realise the terrible nature of their sins against Joseph. The years had not taken away that fact, and it was deeply engraved on their hearts and minds. What they had done had been grievous in the extreme: it had been gross wickedness. And that is something very few people want to admit about themselves in today's world, but these men were only too aware of their evil past. They were displaying hearts that had been made sensitive to sin by the Holy Spirit. (See John 16:7-11.) As they dwelt on the past at this juncture, they had come to the conclusion that their sins were so great that Joseph would not forgive them.

Another lesson their reaction teaches us is that though sin can be done quickly and at the time even seem enjoyable, when it has been brought out into the open the bitter memory of it can plague us for the rest of our lives! Added to all this was the fact that their brother Joseph still maintained a high position in Egypt. He was a man with considerable power and authority, and if he had turned against them then they would have been in serious trouble indeed. And in their minds all sorts of dreadful possibilities seemed to have come into their thinking and the result was they were fearful, even terrified. "*What if Joseph...pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?'*" They used the strong Hebrew term 'pesha' to describe their wrongdoing, which means rebellion. Rebellion against God as well as against Joseph. You may also recall that earlier in the book of Genesis we are told when their grandfather Isaac died, that Esau, the brother of their own father Jacob, wanted to kill Jacob at that time for stealing his father's blessing from him (Genesis 27:41). And this

again may have contributed to the fearfulness of Joseph's brothers now their own father Jacob had died. They were in considerable distress over this.

b. Their plea for mercy (v16-17).

They came up with a plan to try to alleviate the situation and gain Joseph's favour. They sent a message to Joseph, which they claimed had come direct from their father Jacob. Whether in fact it was from Jacob is open to question, and the Genesis narrative appears to lead us to believe that really this was something the brothers made up at this time. Using their father's good name and character they claimed he had left instructions for Joseph to act leniently towards them. We must say that even if the brothers had made this up, the sentiment was certainly something Jacob would have agreed to, not because he doubted Joseph's initial forgiveness, but for the sake of his other sons' peace of heart. Further, the fact that they made this appeal just after Jacob's burial laid greater emphasis on what they were claiming (Genesis 50:16-17): *"So they sent word to Joseph, saying, 'Your father left these instructions before he died: 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and wrongs they committed in treating you so badly,' Now please forgive the sins of your servants of the God of your father.'"* Quite clearly Joseph's brothers were very afraid indeed.

2) Joseph's response (v17c-21).

a. When he heard his brothers' request (v17c).

When this message came from his brothers to Joseph we read a most telling and moving thing about it, *"Joseph wept."* This is something we have seen on a number of occasions in Joseph's life. It was not that Joseph was emotionally unstable or prone to hysteria, but that he was a man who felt things deeply. In spite of the hard knocks he had received, and the immense pressure his high position in Egypt brought to him, he had not lost his sensitivity in things that mattered. He was a man of feeling, and his response makes that very clear. But this raises the question as to why Joseph cried? One feasible answer would be to say because he was angry. After all the kindness he had already shown his brothers, what right did they have to cast the slur upon his character that he was a spiteful and revengeful person! And if this was so then his tears were the angry response of justified righteous indignation! But we would be quite wrong if we came to that conclusion because of the details that followed. Instead, these were tears of merciful compassion. They were tears of sorrow that his brothers were in such distress because they had failed to appreciate that the forgiveness he gave them when they were first reconciled back in Genesis 45 was complete and permanent. He was distressed because they were distressed. He loved them all deeply, and they had not been able to grasp or appreciate the depth of his love for them. His tears were not those of some self-centred egotistical man who felt sorry for himself, but tears of deep concern for his anxious and terrified brothers. They are like the tears of Jesus when he wept over Jerusalem. They

were tears of compassion. All this becomes plain as we read the following verses.

b. His brothers' actions and words (v18).

His brothers were so distraught that they came to Joseph themselves to plead for mercy (Genesis 50:18): *"His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. 'We are your slaves,' they said."* What another moving scene this is, and note the complete absence of that arrogant pride and jealousy that characterised them forty years earlier when Joseph told them about his dreams in which they effectively bowed down to him. Remember their words in Genesis 37:8: *"His brothers said to him, 'Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?' And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he said."* That old pride and hatred had long since gone. Here were men who knew they had been so wrong then, and the remembrance of their past sins against Joseph was so troubling them that they take this quite desperate action. By saying to Joseph, *"We are your slaves"*, they were in effect saying to him, 'You can do what you like with us!' If ever there was an instance of men casting themselves on the mercy of another it is these men now before their own brother Joseph. The only issue that filled the minds of these brothers was, 'What will Joseph do to us?' This was paramount and everything else receded into the background as if it was unimportant.

c. Joseph's response (v19-21).

i. his tenderness towards his brothers.

The grace of God in the heart of Joseph shines forth yet again. First of all he calmed his brothers' fears by directly saying in verse 16, *"Don't be afraid."* And from a human point of view this is quite remarkable. He could have so easily castigated them for thinking such harsh things about him, for despising and doubting the kindness he had already shown them, but he does nothing of the sort. From a heart full of the love of God he speaks tenderly to them, *"Don't be afraid."* This was so similar to the response of the Lord Jesus Christ on many occasions. For example, his words to Jairus, the synagogue ruler, whose daughter had just died in Mark 4:36. He said, *"Don't be afraid; just believe."* Similarly, when his disciples were terrified in the storm at sea and they saw Jesus walking on the water towards them (Matthew 14:27): *"...Jesus immediately said to them: 'Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid.'"*

ii. his basis for that tenderness.

Joseph gave them the reason why they need not fear him at all in one of the most remarkable and clear statements in all the Bible about the sovereignty and goodness of God (Genesis 50:19-20): *"Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."* Here was a man who knew the truth that Paul later stated concerning all who believe in Romans 8:28: *"For we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."* Joseph was so aware that God had been at work in all that had happened to him, and that it was God who had planned, worked and overruled in his brothers' evil

designs that great blessing came about. This was the saving of millions of people from starvation, including Joseph's own family. Joseph had grasped that God was in control; God was King; God was on the throne of the Universe and over the details of his individual life. It was God who had irresistibly worked out his sovereign plans and purposes for Joseph, his family and their descendants. Joseph knew he could not go against what God had done. Therefore, not pretending his brothers had never done wrong, Joseph stated clearly that they had acted with the intention to harm him, but God had used their very sinful actions to bring great good to Joseph and many others. We have to say that God's wonderful ways are past finding out, and this is plainly seen in the way he overruled in Joseph's circumstances. These are the words of a man who knew he was secure in the keeping power of God and that nothing that happened in his life could in any way tear him away from the Lord or stop God's gracious purposes for him being fulfilled.

iii. his reassurance.

Therefore Joseph could not hold any grudges against his brothers. When he had forgiven them back in Genesis 45, seventeen years earlier to the present chapter, his forgiveness had been genuine, deep, and lasting. And so he spoke to them again words of great consolation and compassion (Genesis 50:21): *"So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.*" Joseph had realised the dilemma his brothers were in and he sought to help them out of it, not make it worse. He could so easily have taken

advantage of their vulnerability but he did not. He realised their awareness of their guilt for their sin was immense, and it was this that had coloured their assessment of the situation. They thought they were too guilty for Joseph to forgive them, and Joseph did all in his power to reassure and comfort them. He had forgiven them and would care for them until his dying day.

Application.

There are several important lessons presented to us in this incident in Joseph's life that we need to take note of and from which to learn.

i. A lesson from Joseph's response to his brothers.

When we forgive others our forgiveness is to be genuine and lasting. When repentance has been exercised there is no excuse for us to drag up the past and throw it at people as if they were still perpetuating their wrong doing. I can think of a family where the marriage nearly came to an end because both husband and wife used to drag up the past faults and failings that both had committed and which were repented of and supposedly forgiven at the time, but which had not been dealt with properly by either of them. They had to learn to have the same attitude that Joseph displayed and which we see supremely in the forgiveness granted by the Lord Jesus Christ, to forgive thoroughly and permanently. The memory of someone's wrongdoing against us can sometimes be very hard to erase from our minds, but we must never use it as an excuse to retaliate. Paul puts it so directly in 1 Corinthians 13:5, *"...Love...keeps no record of wrongs..."* Likewise Peter wrote in 1 Peter 4:8, *"Above all, love each other deeply,*

because love covers over a multitude of sins.” As Christian believers we must always be willing to forgive others because the Lord has forgiven us. This again is something Paul stressed in Ephesians 4:32: *“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven you.”* This was certainly something Joseph did. We must learn from the mistake of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18:21-35 who was so unwilling to forgive others and was condemned for it. We need to follow the wise and helpful instruction of Paul on this matter (Galatians 6:1): *“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.”* Joseph had done just that with his brothers, restoring them gently, and he resisted any temptation to be proud or vengeful. The Lord expects us to do the same. And if we find that someone we have already forgiven is still unsure of our forgiveness, then the onus is on us to lovingly and compassionately reassure them.

ii. A lesson from Joseph’s brothers.

Sometimes Christian believers can feel like Joseph’s brothers did concerning the Lord’s forgiveness. We can sometimes fear that God will punish us because of our past sinfulness, even though we have trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness. We can feel so ashamed of our sinful history and be so aware of its enormity that our hearts can be filled with fear about our salvation and we can doubt that we will ever reach heaven at all! Now, we can feel like this for all sorts of reasons – weakening illness can cause it, Satanic attack can cause it, a period of

backsliding can cause it, or it may be doubt and unbelief, or simply the memory of our sinful past. What we must do if we ever feel like this is to take a note from what happened to Joseph’s brothers. They went to the one who could give the forgiveness they needed, although they had forgotten he had already forgiven them. For us this means we need to bring our fears to the Lord himself. Joseph really took his brothers back to the time when they had first been reconciled to him and gently reminded them how he had genuinely forgiven them then, and we must go back to when the Lord Jesus Christ did the same for us. Christ’s forgiveness is much greater than Joseph’s of his brothers because he could only forgive them for some of their sins, the wrong they had done against him, but Jesus forgives us for all of our sins, every single one of them (1 John 1:7): *“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”* Note it does not say he purifies us from some sin, but from all sin. This is a tremendous forgiveness that covers every wrong we have ever committed and every time we have failed to do that which was right and good. This is why we read in Hebrews 7:25, *“Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”* The Lord’s forgiveness of lost hell-deserving sinners is complete, entire, and lacks nothing.

Paul tackled the same problem from a different perspective in Romans 8. He looked at the possibility of someone accusing Christians so that they will be condemned, and he

wrote these words for our comfort, posing a question and then answering it (Romans 8:34): *“Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died – more than that, who was raised to life – is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”* Because the Lord Jesus Christ has died for us, all of our sin has been dealt with, and the fact that he ever lives to pray for us in heaven ensures God will never cast us off and we will never be lost. We will never be condemned if our trust is in the Son of God. In Romans 8:34 Paul is drawing on what he had written earlier in Romans 8:1, *“Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”*

We also need to remember God is not unjust. He is a righteous God and absolutely fair, and will not demand that we pay again for our sins when his own dear Son has already paid the price of our guilt on the cross. And we are told about the Lord Jesus Christ in Romans 3:25 that, *“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”* The Lord Jesus Christ has already paid the penalty for our sin through the shedding of his precious blood. He is that *‘sacrifice of atonement’*, and therefore all our sin is forgiven, covered by God, and will not be used against us any more.

In addition, remember that if we are in Christ then God has already pronounced us righteous. He has already justified us the moment we first believed in his dear Son (Romans 3:22-24): *“This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the*

redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” Therefore we can be absolutely sure that having forgiven us, God’s forgiveness will last for ever and never be taken from us. Yes, our sins and guilt are huge. Yes, perhaps we may have committed some of the most foul and evil of sins. BUT when God forgives us because we have turned to him in repentance and placed our trust, our faith, in the Lord Jesus Christ, ALL of that sin and guilt is pardoned. Jeremiah the prophet prophesied about the blessings of the new covenant brought in by the Lord Jesus Christ, and through him God made this statement (Jeremiah 31:34), *“For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”*

What greater grounds could we possibly have for our assurance and our reassurance that once God has forgiven us, his forgiveness will never be taken from us, and therefore we have no need to fear! Just as Joseph assured his brothers and promised he would provide for all their needs, so in Christ God does the same for every Christian believer, and he will provide all that we need to bring us safely to heaven. Therefore, fearful, doubting believer, look to Christ for he is your Saviour, and look to him alone. Do not look at yourself, for there will be much there to disturb and disappoint you, but look to what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for you through his death at Calvary and his glorious resurrection. He is mighty to save and will not let you go. (See John 10:27-30.) If you have been guilty of backsliding then you need to repent of that and seek the Lord’s mercy afresh, for it is only as we walk with the Lord that the assurance of his salvation can be enjoyed.

Those who are truly the Lord's will not be able to stay in a backslidden state once they realise they have turned away from him, but will come back to the Saviour in humble repentance. Therefore ensure you do walk close to him, because those who persistently forsake God indicate they were never the Lord's children in the first place, so can never enjoy the assurance of his forgiveness until they do follow him. And if you are troubled by the greatness of your guilt in the eyes of God and are fearful that judgement and hell await you at the end of life, then the only way those fears can be relieved is if you turn to God in true repentance and place your trust, your faith, in the saving work and love and power of Jesus Christ who was crucified to save the lost. So, whether you are a believer who is being tried and tested, a believer who is backslidden, or not a believer at all, the only answer to fears about our sins is to look to Christ and bring our need to him, just as Joseph's brothers did with Joseph.

Chapter 7 Genesis 50:22-26 – Joseph's final days

I do not think anyone you talked with would consider you odd or unusual if you said to them that we live in an uncertain world. None of us can be certain of what the future in this world holds for us. On the world scene almost every day we hear of international crises, or political struggles, or unexpected disasters like devastating floods, or plane crashes, or atrocities and so on. And even on the local level we hear of dreadful and unexpected things happening all around us: murders and thefts and brutal attacks on seemingly innocent people walking in the

street. This was brought home to me quite powerfully in two events that took place shortly before I wrote this book. First, the police found the body of a young woman who had been murdered adjacent to a farm owned by a friend of mine, and second, my own son saw a young man of thirty-five playing football with his friends, when suddenly he collapsed and died of a massive heart attack. And these, along with a host of other things, underline the fact that the world we live in is full of uncertainties, and that itself can be very unnerving and even frightening. Indeed, there is one thing about the lives of every single person on earth, and that includes you and me, that is absolutely certain and sure, and in a sense I have already referred to it. Our lives will one day come to an end! All of us are moving nearer and nearer to that moment every second we live, and it is impossible to avoid whether we are taken suddenly and unexpectedly, or whether we live a very long life of many years, our lives on earth will one day cease. And that fact is a very solemn one. There are two great levellers in this world. By that I mean there are two things that bring every single person down to the same level, regardless of what other differences there may be about us, and those two things are that we are all sinners and the lives of all of us will one day come to an end. We may be rich or poor, famous or unknown, powerful or weak, of high rank or low estate, intellectually brilliant or unable to read or write, fit and healthy or frail and ill – we all do wrong and our lives are all moving towards their conclusion. And it is this second great leveller that our attention is drawn to as we look at the final details recorded for us about the life of

Joseph in Genesis 50. This gracious, godly, influential and gifted man of God died. None of his achievements in this world, nor the spiritual progress he made throughout his life prevented that life coming to its end. And so this is a subject we must all consider very carefully and wisely, for we too will go the way of all the earth, to use the dying words of Joshua in Joshua 23:14, and of David in 1 Kings 2:2.

1) Joseph's remaining years (Genesis 50:22-23).

When Joseph's father Jacob died, Joseph himself had reached the age of about fifty-six years, and although we have called this last chapter, 'Joseph's final days', we are really speaking about a very long time, another fifty-four years in fact! Joseph lived until he was aged 110 (v22). Having said that, we have very few details about Joseph's activities during that time. There is no record of what work he did, just that he stayed in Egypt (v22). We must assume that he remained employed by the Egyptian state, at least for as long as he was fit and capable, but precisely what role he took on the Bible does not tell us, but no doubt he used that time wisely. The probable reason why we have few details about this period of his life is that what we have already learned about him has emphasised the part he played in God's redemptive work in sovereignly saving and keeping his people, and this is what God wanted us to appreciate and learn from. However, we do have a few details about his life in that period and it is to these we must now turn.

We are told he lived in Egypt with all his father's family, and throughout this period he provided for them all as he

had promised in Genesis 50:21. How thankful his brothers must have been throughout this period that they had not slaughtered him as they once planned to do in his youth! Through Joseph, God was amazingly gracious to his brothers who had once schemed to be murderers. How true are the words of John Newton in his hymn, Amazing Grace:

*“Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found:
Was blind, but now I see.”*

How blind these brothers had once been, but now by God's grace they had been brought to see the error of their ways and to receive all that they needed from the very one they had wanted to kill. How illustrative this is of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ who comes to sinners who once did not want him to reign over them! When we realise our rebellion against him and turn from it, in his mercy he forgives and forgives and forgives again and then supplies all of our needs. (See also John 1:16; Philippians 4:19.)

Throughout this long period the Lord graciously blessed Joseph so that (v23) he *“...saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.”* It seems he saw his great-grandchildren from Ephraim his younger son, which must have brought him great joy. Children are considered a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3): *“Sons are a heritage from the Lord, children a reward from him”*, and grandchildren a sign of God's special blessing (Psalm 128:5-6): *“May the Lord bless you*

from Zion all the days of your life; may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem, and may you live to see your children's children." (Proverbs 17:6) "*Children's children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children.*" So we must say that Joseph was very blessed indeed to see so many of his descendants. Special mention is made of the children of Makir. Makir was the first born of Joseph's oldest son Manasseh (Joshua 17:1), and his descendants were the Gileadites who were to be known as mighty warriors in Israel (Judges 5:14). Makir's children were placed on Joseph's knees when they were born, as if they were his own. And no one who has seen the birth of a baby can deny the joy this must have brought to Joseph as his years advanced. The man who had been faithful to God through many trials and heartaches was able under the goodness of God to see and enjoy his growing family. Not every believer has that joy, but for those who do we ought ever to thank God for his mercies in our family lives. How this should increase not only our thankfulness to God for them, but also our prayerfulness for their spiritual wellbeing, that they may be brought by the Holy Spirit of God to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ! That is a great responsibility for us to fulfil. We must also add that in the birth of these children Joseph was also witnessing the fulfilment of God's promises to Abraham to multiply his seed (Genesis 12:2, etc.). So they were a tremendous encouragement and source of strength to his faith. The God he had long since trusted was the God who would always do what he said and whose promises cannot fail.

2) Joseph's final words (Genesis 50:24-25).

The time then came when Joseph's earthly pilgrimage and ministry drew to its close, and like his father Jacob, Joseph was also aware that God was calling him to leave this world. Therefore he took special care to speak with his brothers whom he would leave behind (v24-25). And his words were full of trust and confidence in the Lord and all that he had promised for them (Genesis 50:24): "*I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.*" Note that there was the complete absence of fear in Joseph as he approached death. Here was a man who had learned by experience over the years that the Lord is not one who deserts his people in their hour of need. He knew with the Psalmist that the Lord is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble (Psalm 46:1), and therefore could say in the words of Psalm 46:2-3, "*Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*" And so as he came to the end of his life he did so with peace and calm, knowing the Lord was with him and would not cast him off. This is the assurance provided by Christ for all the true people of God. What is so significant is that Joseph, in his dying hours, was full of concern, not for himself, but for his brothers. How similar to the Saviour himself who, even while on the cross, was concerned for the well being of his mother (John 19:26) and for the dying thief (Luke 23:42-43).

So Joseph assured his brothers that the Lord would be their helper and would come to their aid. Indeed, he was so

certain of this he said, *“God will surely come to your aid...”* In addition, his faith was firmly fixed in the Word of God given to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that the Lord would take them out of Egypt and bring them into Canaan, the land promised to them (Genesis 15:16). He was absolutely sure God would fulfil his Word even though several generations had to pass until that time came, and God raised up Moses to lead the people out. But what this teaches us about Joseph was that he was a man of faith in God to the very end. His zeal for God, his love for God, his devotion to God, his trust in God did not diminish as the years passed. He was not like some who have begun well, but then wandered off the pathway and turned from the Lord. What Jesus himself once said in Mark 13:13 that, *“ he who stands firm to the end will be saved”*, was certainly true of Joseph. In those earlier troubled years of his life, when others would have used those trials as an excuse to forsake God, Joseph remained faithful, and now at the end of his 110 allotted years he was as faithful to the Lord as ever. What a challenge his life is to us! How easy it is for us to grow cold in our love to the Lord, or to grieve his Spirit, or to let our devotion and zeal for Christ take second place in our lives to something or someone else. How easy to let trials or the frailty of older years so overtake us that they hinder our fellowship with Christ. Joseph stands as an encouragement and a challenge to us to persevere to the end, and to maintain a bright testimony before others of our faithful God and Saviour whose purposes and promises cannot fail. Joseph pointed others to the Lord even in the dying moments of his life! He did

not say to them, ‘Trust in me’, for if he did their future would have been bleak, but said to them, ‘Trust in the Lord.’ Joseph did what Charles Wesley said he wanted to do in his dying moments. Wesley’s hymn, *‘Jesus! the name high over all’*, ends like this:

*“Happy if with my latest breath
I might but gasp his name;
Preach him to all, and cry in death:
Behold, behold the Lamb!”*

Joseph pointed his brothers to the Lord, and we should want to do the same, even in our dying moments.

Then Joseph made his brothers make a promise (Genesis 50:25): *“And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, ‘God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.’”* We have a lovely comment on these words of Joseph in Hebrews 11:22: *“By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions about his bones.”* He never once doubted what God had promised, and the God who fulfilled that promise in detail is the same God who has promised Christian believers a much better home than the land of Canaan. He has promised the Christian believer that a place is reserved for us in heaven itself, the very dwelling place of God (1 Peter 1:3-5). Indeed there is to be a new heaven and a new earth, the very dwelling place of righteousness (Isaiah 65:17ff; 2 Peter 3:13; Revelation 21:1ff). We shall be with Christ forever (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

3) Joseph’s death (Genesis 50:26).

Joseph's end is described in the simplest of terms (Genesis 50:26): *“So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.”* There was no great ceremony or journey to Canaan as with his father. That journey could wait for God's timing at the exodus. Centuries later his bones were carried there by Moses and Joshua (Exodus 13:19 & Joshua 24:32).

Like all of us, his time came to a close, and he died. But Joseph was ready to die and to go to be with the Lord. The question is, reader, are you? Are you able to die with the assurance you too will go to be with the Lord? Are you really certain of that? All whose faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ can be absolutely sure they are ready to die and when their time comes will go to be with the Lord. But it is only those who express the faith that Joseph had in the Lord who will share in that great blessing. It is absolutely certain your life will come to a conclusion sooner or later, then prepare for that today by seeking the Lord and his mercy now.

Conclusion.

So it is that we come to the end of our studies in the life of this man, and through his life God has taught us so much.

- Joseph was a man of firm faith in the living God.
- Joseph was a man who served the Lord his God in every situation he found himself, living each day for God's glory.

- Joseph was a man devoid of bitterness and full of that forgiving spirit which is found most of all in all its splendour and lavishness in the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Joseph was a man who believed, trusted in, and benefited from knowing that God is absolutely sovereign over every detail of our lives and that nothing in them is wasted.
- Joseph was a man who did all he could to reassure others and point them to the Lord.
- Joseph was a man who could face death with peace and assurance because he was right with God.

May God in his grace and mercy produce those same qualities in us.

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