



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



GENESIS 47 - 50

Genesis 47

47:4-10 - "They said to Pharaoh, "We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks, for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan. Now, therefore, please let your servants live in the land of Goshen." Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. "The land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land, let them live in the land of Goshen; and if you know any capable men among them, then put them in charge of my livestock." Then Joseph brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh; and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Pharaoh said to Jacob, "How many years have you lived?" So Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my sojourning are one hundred and thirty; few and unpleasant have been the years of my life, nor have they attained the years that my fathers lived during the days of their sojourning." And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from his presence."

Joseph brings representatives from his brothers and presents them before Pharaoh. We are given no explanation for why Joseph chose only five of his brothers to meet with Pharaoh but we can assume that he was exercising wisdom in this as in all other decisions he made in handling this entire situation. After the brothers meet with him, Pharaoh grants to Joseph complete access to the land of Egypt on behalf of his family. This is the fullness of the favor of God given to Joseph and the covenant family. The Lord has favorably inclined Pharaoh's heart toward Israel because of the wonderful example and excellent service that Joseph has rendered to him.

Next, Joseph brings his father Jacob to meet with Pharaoh. Keep in mind, that while Jacob is wealthy beyond the average man, he is still a nomad who has come down to Egypt in hope of being sustained in the time of famine by the bounty of Egypt. Pharaoh is currently the most powerful man on the face of the earth as the ruler of the ascendant nation. Yet, when the two men meet, there is an unexpected role reversal. Jacob initiates the communication between them and does so in a way that establishes their relative positions to one another. "Jacob blessed Pharaoh." Normally, when meeting a king, the person in the inferior position was expected to remain silent until the king chose to speak to him. Jacob does not wait for Pharaoh to speak and in speaking first actually risks offending court protocol. What he says also is out of order. By blessing Pharaoh, Jacob speaks to him as his superior. The Biblical principle is described in Hebrews. "But without any dispute the lesser is blessed by the greater." (Hebrews 7:7). Pharaoh was clearly Jacob's superior in every natural way except for their age, yet Jacob blesses him. The pattern established here conveys a spiritual principle that shapes our lives. The principle is that covenant standing trumps all natural advantages. Pharaoh had greater wealth, power, position, prestige, name, etc. based upon natural concerns. Jacob had covenant standing

with the One true God. Jacob's covenant relationship with God was of greater significance than the sum of all of Pharaoh's strengths. Any true believer today who is in right relationship with the Lord stands in a position of greater advantage than Donald Trump, Bill Gates, Oprah Winfrey, or any prime minister or president.

Jacob's superiority to Pharaoh was spiritual, and he did not fail to see the purpose of God in this meeting. God had provided for his family's natural needs through Pharaoh, and in return Jacob pronounces upon Pharaoh a double blessing from God, both at the beginning of their meeting and at the end. In doing so, Jacob fulfills the purpose of God spoken originally to his grandfather Abraham. "And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:3). First through the wisdom and leadership of Joseph and now through the confirming words of the patriarch Jacob, the Lord blesses the ungodly Pharaoh through His covenant representatives. The lesson for the world is that if you treat the people of God well you will be treated well by the Lord. A later Pharaoh is going to learn the hard way the reverse of this lesson when he treats the people of God poorly and is treated by God accordingly.

47:11-13 - "So Joseph settled his father and his brothers and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had ordered. Joseph provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to their little ones. Now there was no food in all the land, because the famine was very severe, so that the land of Egypt and the land of Canaan languished because of the famine."

Joseph is given complete latitude by Pharaoh to settle his family anywhere he chooses in Egypt. Pharaoh specifically offered "the best of the land" for them. Joseph does not respond with unnecessary graciousness. He does not say to Pharaoh, "Oh, no, I could never accept the best of Egypt for my humble family!" Instead, Joseph sees this offer of Pharaoh as the work of God in his heart and he accepts his offer at face value. Joseph settles his family in Goshen which was the best pasture land in all of the nation. He provides land and food for the entire family in the very best location in Egypt for the entire duration of the famine. He also ensures that they will prosper beyond the years of the famine by giving them ownership of the land in a time when the rest of the nation will be losing their ownership of their land to Pharaoh. All of this is the evidence of the faithfulness of the Lord to watch over His people and bless them even in the midst of terribly difficult times of trouble. God is no less faithful in famine to His people than He is in times of prosperity.

The distinctive blessing of Jacob and his family in the midst of a land and people ravaged by famine also raises an important question. The question is, "Is it fair?" Is it really fair for Jacob and his family to be given the best location to live in

Egypt? Is it fair for Jacob to be given land to own when Egyptians all around them will lose their own ownership of their land? Is it fair for Jacob's family to be fed with grain produced in Egypt by Egyptians when they have not earned it? Is it fair for them to be honored above Egyptians? The answer in each case is a clear and simple "No!" It is not fair. It is not fair, rather it is the blessing of God. The Lord chooses to distinguish among people in where and how He gives His blessings. He does not carefully make sure He gives the exact same blessing to every person on earth out of concern to be "fair." "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." (Romans 9:14-15). God is free to bless those whom He chooses and He does so according to His purpose and wisdom, not according to human standards of fairness or equality.

47:14-21 - "Joseph gathered all the money that was found in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan for the grain which they bought, and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. When the money was all spent in the land of Egypt and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came to Joseph and said, "Give us food, for why should we die in your presence? For our money is gone." Then Joseph said, "Give up your livestock, and I will give you food for your livestock, since your money is gone." So they brought their livestock to Joseph, and Joseph gave them food in exchange for the horses and the flocks and the herds and the donkeys; and he fed them with food in exchange for all their livestock that year. When that year was ended, they came to him the next year and said to him, "We will not hide from my lord that our money is all spent, and the cattle are my lord's. There is nothing left for my lord except our bodies and our lands. "Why should we die before your eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for food, and we and our land will be slaves to Pharaoh. So give us seed, that we may live and not die, and that the land may not be desolate." So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh, for every Egyptian sold his field, because the famine was severe upon them. Thus the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he removed them to the cities from one end of Egypt's border to the other."

What an amazing measure of wisdom God granted to Joseph. One man's decisions born in God's wisdom and purpose completely changed the political landscape, economy and society of the greatest nation on earth at that time. Joseph forced nothing upon the inhabitants of Egypt. In each stage of the crisis of the famine the people approached Joseph and asked for his help. He did not take their money, their herds, their land, or even their bodies in slavery. In each case they willingly gave more of what they owned in exchange for the provision of life sustaining grain. God had positioned Joseph for this moment through the prophetic interpretation of Pharaoh's dreams and the wise decisions to stockpile the grains for the previous seven years of abundant prosperity. His wisdom will save not just himself, and not just his family, but the entire nation from starvation.

I am so impressed by the ultimate value of wisdom as evidenced in Joseph's life here. None of us will ever be in the same circumstance as Joseph, but God wants His people, every one of us, to be filled with His wisdom. Each one of us has been positioned by God for a purpose. There will be for each of us moments when the wisdom God has given to us is needed desperately not just for ourselves, but for our families, and for others that God has positioned us to influence and even save from destruction. "For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;" (Colossians 1:9-10).

47:28-31 - "Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed."

There is an interesting description here of Jacob's impending death. "When the time for Israel to die drew near..." What stands out to me is that Jacob is not caught off guard by death. It is one more expression of the blessing of God upon his life that he is aware of his own approaching moment of death. None of us control the timing or moment of our death. Our days are numbered by the Lord. "Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; and in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them." (Psalm 139:16). Yet, it is a great blessing from the Lord to be given by Him a clear sense of when our days have come to an end. This understanding of the near end of his life affords Jacob the opportunity to set his household in order before he dies as he will over the next chapters. His first priority is to make plans for his own burial.

As a young believer years ago I disdained the significance of my own burial and remember assigning no value or importance to it at all. From this and many other portions of God's Word addressing the death and burial of believers I have come to have my perspective completely changed about burial. For Jacob, it is a culminating event of his life. Even though his soul will be gone from his body, he is concerned about the disposition of the body in which he worshipped, walked with and served the Lord. His strong desire is to not be buried in Egypt, but to join Abraham and Isaac in the place where they were also buried. This is not vanity, or mere sentimentality, but true faith and spiritual anticipation in action. Jacob intends to be fully identified with the great purpose and promise of God in

his death just as much as he was in his life. This is the final expression of faith that any believer can make; to be connected and committed to God's purpose beyond our last breath. His burial was to symbolize all of that in a meaningful testimony of his relationship to the Lord and His covenant. Believers today that too lightly dispose of their own bodies, or the bodies of believing loved ones are missing the spiritual import of Jacob's example.

Genesis 48

48:2-5 - "When it was told to Jacob, "Behold, your son Joseph has come to you," Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession.' Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are."

Jacob has reached the end of his life in world and Joseph hearing of his father's weakness brings his sons for what he senses will most likely be his last visit with his father. The character of their time together is recorded by the Lord for our benefit. What stands out immediately is that as weak as Jacob is in his physical frailty, his spirit remains strong and purposeful. He is physically bedridden at this point and must gather all of his remaining strength to even sit up in bed. In spite of his physical weakness, Jacob sees the significance of these final moments with Joseph and his sons and has grace from God to handle them as the spiritual patriarch of the covenant family should. It's notable that the focus of their final time together is fixed upon what is most important while the natural human concerns seem to fade out of the picture completely. We might expect Jacob to reminisce of Joseph's childhood, the times they spent together and even the joy of their reunion 17 years before when Jacob came down to Egypt. Neither does Joseph even mention his past experiences that led to this moment. All that matters in the moments they have left is God's great purpose for their lives and how that purpose will impact the lives of Joseph's sons. His greatest gift that he possesses to pass on to Joseph in this moment is not anything natural, material, financial, or even emotional. His gift to Joseph and his sons is to pass on the blessing of their own participation in the covenant with God. This is the single greatest gift that any Christian parent can ever pass on to their children. There is no greater responsibility for a believing parent than to effectively pass on the same kind of covenant relationship with God that they enjoy.

Jacob takes the lead by recalling one key moment in his life that had nothing directly to do with Joseph. He rehearses for Joseph's benefit, who may never

have heard this story before, the night God appeared to him at Luz (Bethel). This was the dream God gave to him of the ladder reaching from earth to heaven (Genesis 28:11-15). The Lord had spoken to him in that dream and given him a life defining calling and promises. That one experience with God formed the foundation of his future. Now, at the end of his life it is the one experience among thousands in his life that rises to the surface and which he is compelled to pass on to his son and grandsons. He wants them to understand that what he is about to do in blessing Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh is the fulfillment of what God had spoken to him those many years before.

48:13-14 - "Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn."

Jacob gave to Joseph a unique blessing in this private meeting. He chose, by God's unspoken direction, to spiritually adopt his two sons as his own. This essentially gave to Joseph the rights of the firstborn. The firstborn son was technically Reuben, but he had lost his position by his violation with his father's concubine years before. Now, by exalting Joseph's sons to the same position of his own sons in the inheritance rights of the family he was giving Joseph a double portion among the 12 brothers. This adoption as his own sons would be confirmed by his laying his hands upon them and identifying them as his own. Joseph moved forward to position his sons both out of consideration for Joseph's weakness and failing eyesight, and out of his concern for the right order of blessing to be followed. The right order was of course for the firstborn son Manasseh to be under Jacob's right hand which was the symbolic hand of greatest blessing. When the moment came for Jacob to lay hands on the them, he unexpectedly crossed his hands and placed his right hand on Ephraim instead. This was no mistake of failing eyesight or senile error. The word translated "crossing" here indicates that Jacob did this with intelligence or wisdom. He knew what he was doing and did so intentionally.

This is another in a long line of sovereign choices by God in Genesis. Similar in this family's history to the choice of Isaac over Ishmael, or Jacob over Esau, the Lord now chooses to exalt Ephraim over Manasseh, even though there is nothing in their respective histories to show that Ephraim "deserved" to be exalted like this or that his brother deserved to be given the second place blessing. Neither does God or even Jacob explain themselves in this choice. The point is that God does not need to explain this or any other choice that He makes. He is sovereign. The blessings of God are never deserved or earned. If they were earned, would Manasseh have grounds to complain about God's lack of fairness? Or would you and I have grounds to question or complain about what God has chosen to give to us? The answer is a strong, "No!" If the blessing of God were ever earned

or deserved, then what exactly would we all deserve? We would deserved none of His blessings; not even one! Instead, what God has done is give us all the blessings that we do not deserve, but He gives them according to His purpose for us. Jacob learned this deep lesson in his own experience of being blessed over Esau, and now representing the Lord's hidden purpose with spiritual discernment he places his right hand of greater blessing on the younger son Ephraim.

48:15-16 - "He blessed Joseph, and said, "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 redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

Jacob is giving to his son Joseph a brief but potent account of his own spiritual testimony. Jacob had many and interesting spiritual experiences over the course of his 147 years. He does not recount for Joseph all the events or stories. What he does is give Joseph a focused account of the essence of his life story. His testimony is the story of every true believer. Jacob refers three times to the God Who overshadows his life from before his birth (even as he struggled with his brother in the womb) to his last breath. His 147 years of life boiled down to their greatest significance are all about and only about his relationship with God. Jacob's story is not about how cleverly he managed to navigate his own course through life, even though his life began that way. His story "through many dangers, toils and snares" is really all about, "The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day..." Jacob the manipulator is no where to be seen in these final moments of his life. Israel, the man transformed by God to lean on Him rather than on his own strength is the only one that remains. As he looks back on his life he now sees clearly that the Lord was always there watching over him like a shepherd watches over his sheep to guide them, provide for them, guard them.

The blessing he pronounces over the sons of Joseph is one of covenant continuity. Their inheritance is for them to be blessed in covenant relationship with God as he was. For the names of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to live on in them means that their special relationship to the Lord in the covenant will for all successive generations of Israel be the standard by which they measure their own relationship with God. Their lives will not ultimately be measured by any natural measuring stick. They will have good, rich and full lives if, and only if they walk with God like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob walked with God.

48:17-20 - "When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations." He blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'" Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh."

Joseph has a quick reaction to Jacob crossing his hands to bless his sons. He did not like it. "It displeased him." We see Joseph in a different light here than we have through most of his story. From the time when he was first enslaved in Egypt Joseph has always been the most spiritually discerning and wise individual in each circumstance he is in; until now. For the first time we see Joseph fail to discern what is really happening here spiritually and act in a fleshly perspective. Joseph actually attempts to stop Jacob from carrying out this blessing as God had ordained. Joseph can only see in this moment that his father is making a mistake, most likely due to his advanced age and poor eyesight. He steps forward and intends to correct the mistake by grabbing his father's crossed right hand to remove it from Ephraim and place it "where it belongs" on Manasseh. He even speaks up and corrects Jacob for his "mistake." Jacob's response of "I know, my son, I know..." shows that he fully understands Joseph's confusion. It also communicates to Joseph that he is doing this on purpose and not by mistake. His crossed hands represent God's unseen purpose to promote the younger son over the eldest. He comforts Joseph with assurance that God does intend to bless both sons, but that God's order in that blessing does not follow Joseph's preferred order.

What we should learn from Joseph's reaction is the natural difficulty we all experience when we encounter God's sovereignty. His ways are not our ways. His choices are not what we would naturally choose. His sovereign plan and purpose will at key points intersect our lives in ways that just does not seem to go the way we would expect, desire, or even want. Confusion about the hidden ways of God is understandable and God accommodates our confusion by graciously offering like He did here to Joseph some description of His purpose. What is difficult for us though, and where the true test of sovereignty lies is in the absence of a complete explanation. Neither God or Jacob ever fully explain the details of why Ephraim is exalted over Manasseh here. There are many similar things that we will encounter in our own lives. When we discern that God is at work in a situation that does not go the way we would prefer or desire, does that discernment satisfy us? In other words, once we know God is at work, do we then immediately shift into a perspective of abiding trust that He must know what He is doing, even if we cannot fully understand what it is? Or, do we leap like

Joseph did at first here and try to fix what God has apparently broken by grabbing the crossed hands?

Questions from Genesis 47:

Question: I wondered about Genesis 47, verse 9 "few and unpleasant have been the years of my life". Why would he say something so negative to Pharaoh? Is he bitter about what happened with Leah, Rachel's early death, the lose of Joseph?

Answer: I'm glad you asked this question because I wanted to comment about Jacob's conversation with Pharaoh, but did not have the space yesterday. It is of course possible that Jacob was describing his life in bitterness, because even believers are not immune to the danger of bitterness. However, I do not believe he is bitter. This moment is one of the great moments of his life. He has just been reunited with a long lost dearly cherished son. He has just been personally welcomed by the leader of the greatest nation on earth. I don't think these are bitter words, but rather a sober minded, humble description of his life. It was common in that time when presented as a dignitary before another head of state to announce or proclaim the qualifications of why you deserved to stand in this place. Jacob turns this pattern upside down by speaking in a self deprecating manner about his life. He was not great in his own eyes. For instance, Jacob was 130 years old when he described his years as "few". The Egyptian standard for an ideal long life was 110 years old. Jacob was already 20 years older than most anyone alive in Egypt, yet he described his years as few.

His description was not literally true, but rather than boast in his long life that was much admired by the Egyptians he chose to describe himself in humble terms. In the same way, he chose to characterize his life by the difficulties he had faced and endured rather than the many blessings he also enjoyed. I see this as serving a similar purpose to how Paul described his own life in a portion of his testimony. "...in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure." (II Corinthians 11:23-27). Paul could describe his life as unpleasant without bitterness. Like Jacob, the Lord's ordained path for him took him through rather than around serious trials and difficulties.

Genesis 49

49:1-2, 28 - "Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come. Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father... All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him"

Following his private meeting with Joseph and his two sons, Jacob summons his other eleven sons to join them at his bedside. He then addresses each of the twelve sons individually and speaks to them about not just their personal future, but about the future of the tribe of Israel that will descend from them. Jacob is not making wise guesstimates about their future, or describing probabilities. Instead, he is speaking as a prophet of God and as the patriarch of the covenant. What he declares to each son in this chapter will occur. The later history of the twelve tribes as recorded in Scripture follows the description of their future here in exact detail. This chapter then is a critical transition point in God's Word. Until now the story has followed in each generation one key individual primarily. From Adam to Noah to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Joseph the story has focused on an unbroken line of God's purpose worked out in the lives of key individuals that carried God's plan forward in their generation. Now, in this prophetic address to his 12 sons, the Lord reveals through Jacob the coming expansion of God's purpose beyond the scope of single individuals into 12 chosen tribes. Those tribes will share a common bond through their common descent from Israel and will bear that identity together in an even greater way in the future as they will be formed by the Lord together into a single nation.

Each of these 12 sons are blessed in this prophecy with a different blessing. As we have seen before, there is no such thing in the economy of God like we see in our culture today of absolute equality apart from character, morality, and justice. Jacob does not sit down divide his single blessing into 12 equal and identical parts for each son to share. Two are given great blessings, three are given well deserved rebuke and loss of some privilege, and seven fall somewhere between those two categories. In each case the blessing given is "appropriate" for the one who receives it. The appropriateness of each blessing is not according to what the sons deem appropriate, or even Jacob, except as he represents the mind and heart of God because ultimately these are God's blessings to dispense as He sees fit. The two sons given the greatest blessings are Joseph and Judah. Their character and behavior suited them to receive God's greater blessing. The New Testament principle of eternal reward is foreshadowed for us in this pattern. God chooses to reward the faithfulness and obedience of His people in ways that will impact their lives far far into the future.

49:3-7 - "Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it--he went up to my couch. Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; Because in their anger they slew men, And in their self-will they lamed oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, And scatter them in Israel."

This section details the diminished blessing given to three sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi. Because God is gracious, and they remained in right relationship with the covenant family, none of these three lost all of the blessing. They will benefit in the future by entering the Promised Land along with the other tribes and enjoying the fruit of that blessed place. However, the abrupt reality that confronts them in this prophecy is that there is a lasting consequence connected to their behavior as sons. Reuben defiled his father's bed. Simeon and Levi cruelly exceeded the boundaries of true justice in the incident with Shechem. In both cases Jacob had remained silent at the time and had not dealt with them as they deserved for their actions. God did not ignore or overlook their grievous sins even if Jacob did, and now He speaks through Jacob prophetically and holds all three accountable for their transgressions. This principle is so significant for believers today to grasp. Because we are a people whose spiritual lives are forever tied to the cross and the forgiveness that flows to us from God through the cross, many Christians so focus on the forgiveness we enjoy and overlook the principle of long term consequences for sin. Reuben, Simeon and Levi were in a sense forgiven because they continued to enjoy the fellowship of the family and the benefits of the covenant. Yet, there were consequences set in motion by their sin that they could not escape even though forgiven.

An example of this principle would be the case of a believer who sins by cheating on his taxes. If caught, he may repent for the sin and be forgiven by God and the church, but he will still face the consequence that the IRS and the law require. The lesson these three sons have to teach believers today is huge. The spiritual and moral choices we make today have a deep impact on our lives, and our family in this present life, and beyond. These three in a sense model for us the principle that Paul taught not just of eternal reward for believers, but the loss of eternal rewards. "If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire." (1 Corinthians 3:14-15). If this lesson is learned from their bad example the believer will stop to think twice or three times before indulging like Reuben in a moment's pleasure that costs a lifetime of blessing, or like Simeon and Levi indulged in a flash of anger and revenge that forever diminished what their blessing would have been.

49:8-12 - "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk."

Jacob's words in this chapter are prophetic and so we understand that God is speaking through him. That means that every word spoken to all 12 sons is the Word of God and speaks to us. However, that does not mean that every Word from God speaks to us with the same impact or application. All of God's words are important, but some of His Words are staggering in their importance. This prophecy given to Judah is in that staggering category as what is spoken to this one son rises in significance above what was spoken to the other eleven, and continues to speak to us today in the same way. Jacob names Judah as the recipient of the appointed role of firstborn and that he will bear into the unending future the responsibility that goes with that role. Reuben was the actual firstborn, but his sin cost him his role as the firstborn and Judah was appointed by the Lord in his place. As firstborn, the responsibility to take the lead in the family was his. As the 12 sons would grow under the blessing of God into 12 tribes, Judah would eventually ascend into the preeminent tribe. Judah's name which means "the one who is praised" would be fulfilled as the other tribes will come to praise him. This tribe of Judah would later in history be called the Jews as a shortened form of the name Judah. When the single nation of Israel would be split in two under God's judgment generations later, the southern kingdom would be composed of this ascendant tribe of Judah and be known as the kingdom of Judah.

This prophecy has a greater focus than just the future of the tribe of Judah. It is also one of the great prophecies in the Old Testament of the plan of God for the arrival in history of the Chosen One of God, the Messiah. The prophecy concerns a future son from the tribe of Judah that will, like a lion in its strength, arise to rule over all of God's kingdom. Jesus is this lion of the tribe of Judah. "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals." (Revelation 5:5). Though we never saw in the 33 years of His life here in this world the fulfillment of this prophecy, that does not mean that it does not perfectly describe Him and only Him. His rule as God's Messiah was never intended to be fulfilled in those 33 years. His rule was destined to follow the accomplishment of the plan of salvation in His death on the cross, resurrection from the dead, and ascension back to heaven. It was when He returned to heaven in final victory that God gave Jesus the scepter of the kingdom. From the moment of His ascension until now, Jesus rules as King of kings and Lord of lords!

49:22-26 - "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers. "

In the progression of each covenant generation until now one son was chosen to bear for the next generation the twin aspects of the birthright and blessing of the firstborn. While Esau as the actual firstborn was expected to receive both, remember Jacob ended up with the birthright and the blessing. Now, the Lord chooses through Jacob to divide the birthright and blessing between two of Jacob's sons. Judah was given the responsibility of the birthright in God's purpose for the tribe of Judah to rise to prominence among the tribes and for a descendant of Judah to always be the one to rule. Joseph here is given the second of the two special privileges for the future; the blessing, or double portion of the inheritance. His blessings are going to overflow him in a measure he will not be able to contain. Joseph will be blessed with "blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb." This blessing is not a static blessing, but a growing and increasing blessing into the future. Jacob uses spiritually poetic descriptions to describe the degree and quality of the awesome blessings that will be heaped upon him. Jacob refers to the boundary of the blessing that he had enjoyed in his own life as being the everlasting hills. In other words, God had so blessed him that only the mountains around him could contain them as in a giant bowl. Jacob prays for Joseph that God will cause all of that blessing and more to be poured upon the head of his dearly loved and faithful son Joseph.

Jacob's declaration of blessing upon Joseph is far more than simply the best wishes of a loving father as he considers his son's future. Neither is this a case of incredibly "good luck", "good fortune" or "things going really well" for Joseph. Jacob is speaking on behalf of the Lord and what the Lord intends to do in the future of Joseph's family. Jacob clearly identifies why all this will happen to the tribe of Joseph and Who is solely responsible for it. It is the work of the "Mighty One of Jacob", "the Shepherd" "the Stone of Israel." It is His power, His care and provision, His rock solid faithfulness that will ensure the future blessings of Joseph. It is the same exact One Who ensures our blessings both now and for all eternity.

Genesis 50

50:1 - "Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him and kissed him."

There is a wonderful example of the faithfulness of God to His covenant people in this verse. Years before when Jacob had first learned that Joseph was alive and living in Egypt he hesitated to make the journey to Egypt to see him. The Lord spoke to Jacob then to encourage him to make the journey. God wanted Jacob to know that He had planned the journey to Egypt for him. He comforted Jacob with the promise, not just of a reunion with Joseph, but that he would enjoy a lasting restoration of their relationship. God assured Jacob that Joseph would be there in his final moment of life. "God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, "Jacob, Jacob." And he said, "Here I am." He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes." (Genesis 46:2-4). Now, seventeen years after the Lord spoke those words to Jacob, the time has come for Jacob to breathe his last. When he does, the one son of the 12 that is closest to his side to kiss him and care for him is Joseph. The Lord fulfilled all of His promises to Jacob in his life, and now He fulfills His promise to him in his death.

50:15-20 - "When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong which we did to him!" So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father charged before he died, saying, 'Thus you shall say to Joseph, "Please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.'" And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in God's place? "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."

Once Jacob is buried, Joseph's brothers face an uncertain future. While it is true that Joseph had welcomed them to Egypt and had treated them consistently well for the last 17 years of their living in Egypt, they have no confidence that his attitude and behavior will remain favorable toward them now. Their fear is that Joseph has only been kind toward them because of their father. They saw Jacob as a buffer shielding them over these years from what they feared was a brooding and still offended brother. The burial of their father now removed that buffer and they anticipated that Joseph would now indulge in a long held desire for revenge. He certainly had the power to do so as the regent of Egypt and could deal with them in any manner he chose. They suspected that Joseph would turn on them now, not because he had ever given them even a hint of an

intention to do so, but because they judged Joseph based on their own character. It was "only natural" to expect him to now vent his imagined bitterness toward them.

What Joseph's brothers failed to comprehend was the dominant power of God's grace at work in Joseph's heart, not just this one day of Jacob's burial, but throughout the long years and difficult trials that their betrayal had caused for him. They considered the influence of their sin on his heart to be greater than the power of God's influence to turn a natural reaction into a spiritual transformation. They failed to recognize the hand of God upon Joseph. Their fear does serve one needed purpose here though. Their fearful expression of repentance (even though years late) does provide Joseph another opportunity to powerfully declare the work of God in him through these years and in this circumstance. Joseph gives glory to God first by refusing to take the low road of the flesh and act toward them as if he was in the place of God. When we unrighteously judge another and hold bitter vengeance in our heart toward them we are attempting to take the place in their lives that belongs only to God. Joseph recognized this as holy ground, and where only God deserved to stand.

Joseph's next statement is one of the most amazing declarations of the deep purposes of God in all of Scripture. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result..." He looks back 93 years and sees that on that fateful day when his own brothers threw him into a cistern and then sold him into slavery that there was more going on than what he wanted or even what his brothers wanted. Joseph sees the hidden plan of God in all of this. Without a shred of bitterness or blame, Joseph has come to believe that it was God Who brought him to Egypt not his brothers. This insight does not eliminate their responsibility for their sin. Joseph does not dismiss their heart intention, and instead labels it for what it was; evil. Yet, because he now recognizes the deeper and unseen hand of God behind their hand, he is able to fix his heart on the greater good accomplished by the plan of God in spite of their evil intention. Yes, they meant to do evil to him, but what God meant to do overwhelmed what they meant to do. He is free from bitterness toward them because he knows that ultimately he was in the hand of God all along.

50:21 - "So therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." So he comforted them and spoke kindly to them."

Joseph's brothers specifically asked Joseph for the first time for his forgiveness. "And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." What is interesting is that Joseph never actually said the words, "I forgive you." Him not saying those exact words was not an indication that he was choosing to hold on to their transgression so that he could hold it against them at some future time. Joseph did forgive his brothers. He forgave them fully and graciously from his heart. How can we certain that he did forgive them? His promise to them in this verse and his actions in the years that followed displayed

true spiritual forgiveness. I refer to what Joseph did for his brothers as "true spiritual forgiveness" because it is necessary to distinguish what he did from what even believers often do thinking they have forgiven someone when they have not.

Forgiveness is commonly identified as the choice to "let it go" when another person has hurt or offended us and later communicates "I'm sorry" for what they had done. The decision to "let it go" may lead to real forgiveness, but it often falls short as the offended person commonly continues to dwell on the offence, talk about it, and act as though they were still holding a grudge toward the person that hurt them. Biblical forgiveness is not based on any reasonable consideration of how we would expect a hurt or offended person to treat the one that hurt them. Biblical forgiveness is based in the perfect model of forgiveness that we ourselves have received from God through His Son. "...forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you." (Ephesians 4:32). His forgiveness of us becomes a pattern for us to follow as disciples follow their master's example. What did Joseph's forgiveness of his brother's sin against him look like? It looked just like the forgiveness of Christ. Joseph put his brother's fears of reprisal from him to rest. He encouraged their hearts to have no fear of him. He promised to provide for them and even for their little ones. He comforted them and spoke kindly to them. He treated them exactly as they did not deserve to be treated. He treated them exactly the opposite of how they had treated him. He treated them as Christ would have in the same circumstance. He did not continue to dwell on their previous sin in the years to come, by brooding on it or calling it to mind. He did not talk about their sin by rehearsing to others how they had mistreated him in order to call attention to himself and elicit sympathy from others. He never again for the rest of his life acted against them, but rather only acted for their benefit and the benefit of their families. This is real spiritual and Biblical forgiveness. This is how God calls us to forgive one another.

50:24-25 - "Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die, but God will surely take care of you and bring you up from this land to the land which He promised on oath to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob." Then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear, saying, "God will surely take care of you, and you shall carry my bones up from here."

Joseph lived a long life of 110 years. He was 17 years old when his brother's betrayal sent him to Egypt. That means he lived a total of 93 years in Egypt. Joseph's best days were spent in Egypt. He attained great honor and significance in Egypt. His wife was an Egyptian and his sons were half Egyptian. His career was in Egypt. His spiritual calling and mission were in Egypt. After 93 years in Egypt and only 17 in Canaan, he was no doubt more familiar with Egypt and the Egyptian culture than that of the Promised Land. Yet, when the time for his death arrived, he was concerned to have his brothers swear to him that they would carry his bones with them for final burial back to the Promised Land. The practicality of his request was difficult at best. The place he wanted to be buried

was 300 miles away from where he died. He knew first hand what was involved in making such a journey having done so for his father Jacob. In addition, the fulfillment of his desire would have to await the time in future generations when the Lord would lead the children of Israel out of Egypt to return to the Promised Land. Until then, he would for the interim have no permanent burial place for his bones.

All of this indicates just how much easier and more convenient it would have been for Joseph to decide to be buried in Egypt instead. What could be so important for Joseph to insist on this burial site so distant in geography and time? There was only one reason for Joseph. He wanted to be buried in the land that God had promised to his father, grandfather and great grandfather. His commitment to a Promised Land burial was an expression of the faith with which he anchored his life to the Lord. "By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gave orders concerning his bones." (Hebrews 11:22). Joseph lived out his life in Egypt by the commission of the Lord, having only briefly visited Canaan for his father's burial, but his heart was more identified with the Promised Land than it was with Egypt. The lesson applies in a similar way for us. We live out our lives and calling here in this present world by God's design and for His purpose. But, this world is not our final resting place. Our lives are here, but our hearts are anchored by faith to our eternal home.

Questions from Genesis 49:

Question: 49:5-7 - How does Jacob's diminished "blessing"/prophecy to Levi relate to that tribe being priests in service unto the Lord? Why might the Lord grant them a service of such great honor when their sins were so grievous as to receive a negative form of blessing?

Answer: Good question. The diminished blessing was given by Jacob to both Simeon and Levi. He addresses both sons / tribes in the identical way and we would expect an identical or at least very similar future for both tribes. In the proceeding history of Israel we find Simeon receding into the background as we would expect and having little role in the future of the nation. They are so diminished that later, in the distribution of the Promised Land to the tribes, the portion of land given to them is what is leftover from Judah's portion. On the other hand, the tribe of Levi later becomes one of the most significant tribes of all due to their special role as priests to serve in God's tabernacle and temple. The answer to why Simeon remains diminished, but Levi is restored to a position of significance is not found in our Genesis passage, but is explained in the book we will study next. Briefly, when Moses first comes down from Mt. Sinai with the tablets of God's Law and finds the people worshipping the golden calf, he stands in the gate of the camp and makes a public call for whoever will stand with him for the Lord to join him (Exodus 32:26-29). The only tribe of the 12 that responded to his call then was the tribe of Levi. Their faithfulness to the Lord in a moment of great spiritual crisis was rewarded by the Lord with their designation for the remainder of the Old Testament as the tribe to serve in His tabernacle / temple.