

Open Heart, Open Bible

Genesis and Luke's Gospel

Linking Theme: Covenant

Passage for weekly reading (week 10):

Genesis ch.'s 44 - 50

The End of the Beginning

Joseph – an example to follow

The motive behind Joseph's ruse, that of putting his own silver cup in the mouth of Benjamin's sack, was surely to test his brother's reactions. They abandoned him all those years ago – would they now abandon Benjamin, if it meant they could go free? He has no means of knowing how the family has rallied together over the length of time he has been away from them. Judah instantly comes to Benjamin's support, and opens up before Joseph as to the situation back home. Jacob would die of a broken heart if his youngest should not return.

Judah's offer to remain in slavery is as much as Joseph needs to know and, dismissing the Egyptian servants, he breaks down in front of his brothers. Surely, many years of emotional pain were released by those tears! His understanding of the big picture, the work of God behind the drama of life's trials and tragedies, is what has sustained Joseph during the years of separation. If anyone was truly a man of vision, it was he. With that understanding, he could love and forgive (45 v.'s.5-11). The brothers are sent back to their homeland with the blessing of Pharaoh, and Jacob is revived on hearing their news. He decides to return with them to Egypt.

The night-time vision of 46 v.3 given to him at Beersheba (where else?) confirms the rightness of his decision, and gives him confidence. It is significant spiritually that the number of Israel's family who travelled to Egypt at the beginning of their long stay in that land was sixty-six; seventy, if we add Jacob himself, Joseph and his two sons. This corresponds to the seventy nations mentioned in Genesis 10 as the peoples spread out after the rebellion at Babel. Moses makes a clear reference to this in Deuteronomy 32 v.'s 8&9 as he recites his powerful song of prophecy to the assembly of the nation. It is worth quoting:

**When the Most High gave the nations their inheritance,
when He divided all mankind,
He set up boundaries for the peoples
according to the number of the sons of Israel.
For the Lord's portion is His people,
Jacob, His allotted inheritance.**

We are now part of that inheritance! (Ephesians 1 v.18).

Ch. 47 gives the story of the worsening famine, the people exhausting their money supplies, then selling their livestock to purchase grain. The following year the people sold their land and their very bodies in order to stay alive. They all became slaves, in effect. The people knew, nevertheless, that their lives had been saved, and were grateful, not resentful (v.25). Jacob now anticipates his death, and asks Joseph to bury him in Canaan with his fathers.

They are touching moments in ch.48 when Jacob (Israel) is able to see Manasseh and Ephraim shortly before he dies, and pronounce his blessing on them, giving them the full rights of sons (v.5). This is yet another case of the younger being preferred over the elder (contrary to custom), speaking of the sovereignty of God in election.

The blessings Jacob speaks over his sons very much emphasise that deliberate sin and bloodshed make for awful cost down a generational line. Thus, **Reuben's** sin with Bilhah (35 v.22) has diminished his stature as the firstborn son, and **Simeon** and **Levi** will continue to pay the price of their violence after the rape of Dinah (34 v.25). Albeit Judah had committed fornication with Tamar, he had seen the error of his ways, and demonstrated his repentance by his actions (38 v.26). **Judah** is soon established as the leading tribe, and v.10 is a wonderful example of inspired Messianic prophecy, v.11 foreshadowing the triumphal entry of our Lord into Jerusalem on the foal of an ass (Matthew 21v.5), and giving a hint of John's visionary picture of Jesus in Revelation 1vs.14,15. Jesus has now taken that royal "sceptre", but the obedience of the nations is not yet His. It will be! For this reason He has given the Great Commission to His church (Matthew 28 v.'s 18-20).

The remaining prophetic blessings are brief in comparison, and do not appear to be in any specific order. They are just "gathered around" (v.1)!

Zebulun was the last of Leah's six sons. Surprisingly, his allotted land had no sea-coast, but "the way of the sea", the great road from Damascus to the Mediterranean, went through his portion, and more Gentiles settled here than in any other part of the Holy Land, as time went on. Hence, the references in Isaiah 9 v.1 and Matthew 4 vs.12-16. (Combined with Naphtali, below).

Issachar was Leah's fifth son. The blessing sounds somewhat qualified, but other Biblical references to him and the tribe show that they often acquitted themselves well in situations of national crisis, in particular the complement paid to her leaders in 1 Chronicles 12 v.32. Issachar was, historically, a grouping that was content with an agricultural lifestyle, instead of aspiring after political power, and his straight-forwardness was something that God was pleased to use.

Dan was Bilhah's first son, his name meaning "judge". Dinah was the corresponding female name. The fact that Samson was a judge from this tribe can be seen as a part fulfilment of Jacob's words.

Gad was the firstborn of Zilpah, the prophetic reference being to nearby Arab raiders who would invade his territory and then return, but not without Gad snapping at their heels as they went! Gad and Reuben were united together on the south side of the Tabernacle in the orderly marching sequence of Numbers ch. 2 (vs.10,14), and since they wished to remain as shepherds they were allocated land together, east of the Jordan, being therefore more exposed to attack.

Asher, Gad's younger brother, appears to have a pleasant word spoken over him, but it is double-edged. Asher generally responds with faint-heartedness whenever crises arise, and he and Simeon are the only tribes west of the Jordan who produce no obvious leader or judge. (The one exception is Anna, the prophetess who merits special mention in Luke's Gospel as one who had a lifestyle of worship, and instantly recognised the Christ-Child (Luke 2 vs.37,38)).

Naphtali, the second of Bilhah's children, is linked with Zebulun in prophecy (see above), so named by Rachel because he was one born out of "struggle". (N.I.V. margin translates the bearing of "beautiful fawns" as the uttering of "beautiful words".) The prophetic link with Zebulun augers well for Naphtali as a bearer of good tidings to those Gentiles who traversed his borders.

Jacob's words over Joseph show us how personal the Lord had become to him in his own walk of faith – the "Mighty One of Jacob", followed by a reference to Jesus himself, had he realised it! In **Joseph** we have seen a type of Christ, and the blessings are an acknowledgment of that, being everlasting in their dimensions (the "age-old" hills are the "everlasting" hills in K.J.V.). He is set apart from his brothers, a "prince" amongst them (v.26). Jacob gave to Joseph the recognition of the firstborn simply by giving an equal inheritance to Manasseh and Ephraim, which meant that Joseph had a double portion, compatible with the eldest son. Yet, in the mystery of divine predetermination, it was not Joseph but Judah who took this position as the history of Israel unfolded. Whether Jacob knew it or not, he had already prophesied this pre-eminence over Judah! (vs.8-12). His heart always had been towards Joseph, but the Holy Spirit, in speaking through him, prophesied in favour of Judah.

Many are the plans in a man's heart,

But it is the Lord's purpose that prevails. (Proverbs 19 v.21).

Benjamin was the only one of Jacob's sons born in Canaan (Bethlehem - Gen. 35 v.'s 16-19). Although he was the son of his father's deepest affection in the absence of Joseph, the words spoken over him have a hostile and warlike tone. The civil war which Benjamin waged alone against the rest of the nation (Judges ch.20), had

disastrous consequences for him, and is foreseen here. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, and we can see something of the tribal character in his turbulent kingship (1 Samuel 9 vs.1&2).

Ch.50 gives an impressive account of the procession that accompanied Joseph with the body of his father to the land of Canaan. The other brothers felt very insecure without him (v.15), and Joseph “weeps” when he hears of this. It reminds us of Jesus’ tears at the grave of Lazarus (John 11 v.35). Again, his understanding of the heart and purposes of God in all that has happened demonstrates his greatness. It is Christlike in compassion. Before he dies he reaffirms the covenant promise to Israel as a nation, and tells the brothers that God will come to their aid. What did he mean?

Food for thought / discussion / prayer.

1) Joseph is a wonderful example to any who read of him as to what it means to live with a vision from God (44 vs.4-7 and 50 vs.19-21). It held him in adversity, and was the source of his wisdom and courage in prosperity. It enabled him to live humbly before God whatever his circumstances. Does his life help you to gain a godly vision for your own life, through which you can become more like Jesus? If so, are you willing to pursue it? (see Acts 26 v.19).

2) Jacob himself comes over as being one who lives with a level of depression having lost Joseph (47 v.9), in spite of his life-changing experience at Peniel. By contrast with his son of promise, had he lost something of the heavenly vision, which led to his inward-looking tendencies? If so, why, and what can we learn from this?

3) Have you enjoyed reading through the Book of Genesis? What have you gained from it? Could you help in the discipling of a younger believer by taking the person through it? Remember we’re all called to “make disciples”!

Next week’s passage: Luke 1 - 6