

GENESIS 37-50

JOSEPH & THE COMFORT OF GOD'S SOVEREIGN PURPOSES

Joseph's life covers (roughly) the final one-fourth of Genesis. What's the main takeaway? Joseph's life is meant to be a narrative example, an illustrating story of all that we've seen in Genesis thus far. The promises to the patriarchs? Joseph's life is a story of those promises being acted out. And his life also serves as a key bridge from Genesis to Exodus, to the next stage of salvation history. Joseph's life centers around two key words: promises and providence.

As you read these chapters, you will see/be reminded of the broad brush strokes of Joseph's story. From his dreams to enslavement by his brothers, from Potiphar's house to the prisons of Egypt, from interpreting dreams to his place at the right hand of Pharaoh. It is truly an up and down story if there ever was one—and yet it is a story of God's faithfulness to his promises. Let's trace our three promises from Genesis into the life of story. The land and multiplied offspring go together in the end of Genesis. Genesis 47:27 says, "Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly. They may not be in the promised land, but they are in Egypt—which if you remember Genesis 15:13-14, their affliction in Egypt is a crucial step to them receiving the land. But they are being fruitful and multiplying. They are increasing greatly in number. Where do you recognize that "be fruitful and multiply" language from? Genesis 1:26-28—God's original command to Adam and Eve. God's blessing to his people is beginning to show as they multiply, just as he promised. Finally, there is the promise of universal blessing. The promise that as God blesses the line of Abraham, they will be a blessing to the world. We see that powerfully in Joseph's life. Joseph first is a blessing to Potiphar and his house as he serves him well (Genesis 39:1-6). What may seem like an insignificant detail is actually quite important—for it is the first time that a non-covenant member is blessed by a covenant member in Genesis. This then climaxes in Joseph's life as he receives a dream from God, and then uses it to bless Egypt and the surrounding nations through preservation of food in anticipation of the famine (41:37-57). What does this sound like? "Through you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3). Joseph is beginning to fulfill, and therefore display, the goal of the covenant: for Israel to receive blessing in order to bless the nations. Joseph then stands as a figure pointing to Jesus—the one who will ultimately bless the nations through the salvation he brings. Joseph's life helps us see the promises of God—even if they are not fully realized yet

The other key idea with Joseph's life is that of providence: God directing all things according to his ultimate plan. Joseph has some of the most serious wrongs done to him that we have recorded in the Bible. He is sold into slavery by his brothers, wrongly blamed by Potiphar's wife for something he didn't do, and left in prison to rot despite being faithful to serve strangers. It's simply unfair. And yet, hear what Joseph tells his brothers—who realize they have significantly wronged him—at the end of the book. "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today" (Genesis 50:20). What did Joseph recognize? God's providential hand behind all things. Would he have picked them? Absolutely not. But he understood that in order for God to be faithful to his promises (and bring them about), God has to be sovereign, in control over all things.

It's like this line from the classic William Cowper hymn: "*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, But trust Him for His grace; Behind a frowning providence He hides a smiling face.*" The same hidden providence that was directing these events against Joseph would ultimately culminate in the death of Jesus to save sinners. Peter spoke saying, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God..." (Acts 2:23). Whether in Joseph's story in Genesis, looking at the life of Jesus, or thinking of your own life, just remember: there is a good and loving God who stands behind all things, who is working all things according to his plan and purpose—for his glory and for him to be known. Let us then be like Joseph in our faith in God's promises and providence—that even when we can't understand it, we trust that God is working all things for our ultimate good (Romans 8:28).