

JOSEPH'S FORGIVENESS AND HIS FINAL DAYS **(Genesis 50:15-26)**

God is a God who keeps His promises. With the death of Jacob another generation of God's chosen people had passed away. God had made a grand covenant with Abraham, a promise to make Abraham into a great nation in the land of promise and to eventually bless all people on earth through him. This grand covenant passed from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob. Now that grand covenant rested with Jacob's sons, the twelve tribes of Israel. Living in the land of Egypt, these descendants of Abraham would experience hardship and slavery, but God would fulfill His promise. Jacob's son Joseph gave voice to the Israelites' faith in God's covenant. But first he had to assure his brothers of his forgiveness. In Joseph's declaration of forgiveness and faith we see the forgiveness of Jesus Christ for all who believe. Because God is faithful, we receive forgiveness through faith in His Son. The final verses of Genesis point to the themes of forgiveness, divine providence, and hope.

**Forgiveness—life is
too short to hold grudges (50:15-17).**

Because Joseph was a man of faith he had readily forgiven his brothers for selling him into slavery. But his brothers feared that Joseph's forgiveness might be fleeting. Joseph had to reassure them that forgiveness is final. Life is too short to hold grudges.

Joseph's brothers expressed their fears that Joseph would retaliate against them once their father was dead (50:15).

Joseph's brothers, prompted by jealousy and hatred, had sold Joseph into slavery. But over the years Joseph had risen from slavery to great influence in Egypt. He was able thereby to save his father and brothers from the ravages of famine. In the process, Joseph had extended forgiveness to his brothers (Genesis 45:4-5). But now Jacob, their father, was dead. Would Joseph revisit his brothers' crime? His brothers feared that Joseph might release some latent vengeance now that the restraining influence of his father was gone. To their credit, Joseph's brothers didn't shirk their responsibility for their crime or try to shift the blame. They admitted that their treatment of Joseph had been evil. Often the restoration of a broken relationship begins with honest confession.

Joseph's brothers relayed their father's wish that Joseph would forgive them, and Joseph wept (50:16-17).

In order to secure Joseph's forgiveness his brothers told him about their father's final wishes. They claimed that Jacob had instructed them to tell Joseph to forgive them. Whether or not Jacob actually gave his sons these instructions is debatable, but Jacob most certainly would have wanted Joseph to extend forgiveness and restore harmony within the family. Joseph's brothers had committed a grievous sin against Joseph, but now

they begged for Joseph's forgiveness. They referred to themselves as servants of the God of their father, an expression of humility. But these brothers hadn't begun to comprehend Joseph's faith and generosity. Joseph held no grudges. When he heard his brothers' plea he wept. His tears clearly revealed his heart of love, forgiveness, and grace. Joseph had suffered greatly, but he also forgave freely. Jesus, too, suffered for us so that we can freely receive the forgiveness of God.

**Providence—God is
too good to waste suffering (50:18-21).**

Joseph was able to forgive his brothers because he saw the bigger picture. He knew that God had been at work, providentially guiding him to a position of prominence. God does not waste suffering on His people.

Joseph's brothers offered themselves as slaves to Joseph (50:18).

Unconvinced by Joseph's tears, his brothers fell down before Joseph and offered themselves as his slaves. Many years prior to these events God had predicted through dreams that Joseph's brothers would bow before him (Genesis 37:5-11). But Joseph harbored no pride and held no resentment. He never demanded his brothers' subservience and he refused to enslave them. After all, these men were his family.

Joseph reassured his brothers of God's providential care (50:19-21).

Joseph told his brothers that they had nothing to fear. Joseph could humbly acknowledge that he didn't stand in the place of God. To exact judgment would be to take on divine prerogatives. It was true that Joseph's brothers intended evil by selling Joseph into slavery. But God was still in control. What these brothers did out of evil intentions God used for good. God orchestrated the events of Joseph's life in such a way that Joseph could rise to power and save countless lives through a time of dire famine. Joseph then repeated to his brothers, "Do not be afraid." Joseph would continue to provide for his brothers and their families. Joseph "spoke to their hearts," comforting them in their uncertainty and fear. God hadn't wasted suffering on Joseph, but had worked through his hardships to providentially accomplish the divine purpose. Like Joseph, Jesus suffered ill treatment in order to accomplish the divine purpose, the salvation of countless souls.

**Hope—it's never
too late to trust God (50:22-26).**

The years passed. Joseph lived a long life in the land of Egypt. However, as a man of faith Joseph's eye was on the promise of God. He trusted God to fulfill His promises.

Joseph lived a long and prosperous life in Egypt (50:22-23).

Joseph lived out the remainder of his life in Egypt, as did his brothers and their families. Joseph was 17 years old when he was sold into slavery and sent to Egypt (Genesis 37:2). He was 30 when Pharaoh elevated him to a position of power (Genesis 41:46). He would have been 39 when his father and brothers migrated to Egypt (Genesis 45:6) and 56 when Jacob died (Genesis 47:28). Joseph would live an additional 54 years, reaching the age of 110. Some ancient records hint that this was the ideal extent of life according to Egyptian thinking. Because of his long life Joseph was able to enjoy grandchildren and even great grandchildren. The text specifies that Joseph had grandchildren through his son Ephraim. Joseph also had a grandson through Manasseh, Makir, who then gave Joseph great grandchildren. Makir's children were "born on Joseph's knees." In other words, Joseph enjoyed an extended, intimate, loving family relationship. God greatly prospered Joseph's life in Egypt.

Joseph realized that he was about to die and promised that God would restore the Israelites to the land of promise (50:24-25).

Even though God prospered Joseph in Egypt, Joseph knew that Egypt wasn't his home. He belonged in God's Promised Land. Joseph told his brothers (probably including his extended family) that he was about to die. But he assured them that God would one day visit them and restore them to the land promised to their ancestors—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Joseph was a man of faith. He believed in God's grand covenant. Therefore, Joseph made his family, the "sons of Israel," swear that when God came to their rescue they would carry his bones from Egypt to the Promised Land. Hebrews 11:22 identifies this declaration about a future "exodus" as a mark of Joseph's faith. Joseph believed that God would keep His promises.

Joseph died and was buried in a coffin in Egypt (50:26).

The book of Genesis ends with the record of Joseph's death at the age of 110. "And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt." Because of Joseph's exalted position he no doubt received the best burial treatment Egypt could provide. It has been observed that Genesis begins with the majestic words, "In the beginning God . . ." and ends with the phrase, ". . . in a coffin in Egypt." God's creation design had been tarnished by sin and death. However, God, because of His grand covenant, would bless all nations of the earth through His chosen people and ultimately through their greatest descendant Jesus Christ. Jesus came to die for our sins, to conquer death by way of His resurrection, and to restore us to life with our creator God. Because God is faithful, we can receive forgiveness through faith in His Son. Through Jesus Christ we become God's new creation.