

Israel Remains in Egypt ... but God

Genesis 50:15-26 | GCC | 10 April 2022

Introduction

Good morning, church. My name is Kyle and I'm a covenant partner here at GCC.

Today we will finish the book of Genesis. It's been a long, on-and-off journey through the book. GCC has preached from Genesis for portions of the last five years. I personally checked my calendar and I preached on Genesis 11 back in September of 2018, when GCC still met in the other room.

I preached on various other passages in Genesis across this series. Some were here and some were online over Zoom. I remember when the PM announced the FMCO back in May of last year. The church where my family served had been able to meet in-person for a few weeks in a row. We had seen three people baptized on April 18th—including my daughter, Abby. But with the announcement of another full lockdown, as strict as any lockdown we had previously faced, my heart sank. I knew that school was going back online—both for me in my teaching and my children in their studies. I knew that I could no longer travel to KL from PJ without police permission. Most importantly, I knew that church was going back online.

I began to hate online church. I struggled not hearing my brothers and sisters sing with me. I struggled not being able to take the Lord's Supper for so long. I struggled preaching sermons with everyone else on mute, half of the cameras off, and no interaction with people after the service. Worse, many churches where I preached preferred pre-recorded sermons. This meant that I preached to a computer. And when my family worshipped, we were simply watching a YouTube video like we might watch Dude Perfect, Mr. Beast, or Jinnyboy. It was not the way things were supposed to be.

And if I'm honest, I feared that it would always be this way. I feared that we would never move beyond digital church. Maybe the pandemic would keep going. Maybe people would choose digital church over analog church. I prayed that people would be unsatisfied with

digital substitutes. I understand that many still need to join online, but I continue to pray for the day when we can all be reunited in-person once again.

Our realization during online worship that things were not how they were supposed to be is similar to how the Israelites would have felt at the end of Genesis. They were out of place. They were not where they were supposed to be in the Promised Land. They were not as numerous as the stars of heaven or the sand on the seashore. They were not a nation. Abraham's name was not great. They were recently impoverished, shepherd, refugees, living off the abundance of Pharaoh in Egypt.

How would they have felt? Would they have questioned God? Would they have wondered if their ancestors were just crazy, old shepherds making up stories about great promises? How should we act when things are out of place for us? How should we think about life whenever things don't seem to happen as we would expect? What I want us to see this morning, is that ...

CPS: In times of fear and uncertainty, we should place our trust in the Lord and his promises in the gospel.

Our passage this morning has two sections. They are clearly separated in most translations, so you can probably see them in your Bible this morning. The first section is Gen 50:15-21. In this section, we see that God provides for his chosen family. The second section is Gen 50:22-26. In this section, we see that God will fulfill his promises.

Let's look together at the first section this morning, where we see that ...

God will preserve his chosen family (Gen 50:15-21)

Read Gen 50:15-21.

Jacob's death makes the brothers fear for their safety, but Joseph promises to provide. In these verses, we see the restoration of God's chosen family.

In our first verse, the brothers initiate a dialogue with Joseph out of fear. After Joseph revealed himself to the brothers back in ch. 45, their dismay held back any response. In that passage, Joseph assured them that God had sent him ahead of them to Egypt. He told them not to punish themselves on account of their previous actions. However, in that passage, the

brothers remained silent. Moses says that they did not talk until after Joseph gave a speech, directed the brothers' next actions, and wept over them. Still, Moses does not reveal what they said to him at that moment. They told Jacob only that Joseph lives and is an Egyptian lord. Moses does not indicate how the brothers responded internally to the family reunion.

Genesis 50:15 shows us how they truly feel. They still do not trust Joseph. They fear his "hatred" toward them and that he will "pay us back for all the evil that we did to him" (15). Why do the brothers—apparently including Benjamin—continue to fear Joseph? Jacob had apparently provided the uniting force for the family. With Jacob dead, they fear that Joseph will revert to his previous harsh treatment toward them.

They inform Joseph about Jacob's statement. Did the brothers make up Jacob's words or had Jacob truly given them a statement for Joseph? Moses does not say. Both seem possible. Their request to Joseph appeals to their father's authority—"your father gave this command." It humbly asks for forgiveness. It self-describes the brothers as slaves to Jacob's God. This request appeals both to their father's authority and their faithfulness to Jacob's God. Their appeal relies on two key factors of what makes someone an Israelite—family and faith.

They treat Joseph as an Egyptian lord and not as a brother. They proclaim themselves as his slaves (18), even as the Egyptians had offered themselves as slaves to Pharaoh in ch. 47. Joseph tells them to "not be afraid." He asks, "Am I in the place of God?" His question mirrors Jacob's question to Rachel in response to her barrenness back in ch. 30. Both stories evoke questions of God's justice. In our passage, Joseph restates his previous promise to provide for the family. Moses ends the scene with a comment about Joseph's kind speech and his comfort to the family. The turmoil of Genesis 37, which originally led to Joseph's exclusion and the fractures in the family, had left Jacob refusing the family's comfort at the end of Gen 37. But Joseph's gracious response leads to his comfort for his family in v. 21. After Jacob's death, the family has truly reconciled.

The question of knowing good and evil alludes back to the beginning of Genesis.

In the middle of his speech, Joseph says one of the most famous lines in the entire book. He says, “However, you planned evil toward me, but God planned it for good.” These words, evil and good, bring us back to Genesis 1–3.

In Genesis 1, there are seven instances where God refers to his creation as good. The first time good is paired against evil is in the description of the tree in the middle of the garden in Genesis 2. In Genesis 2:16-17, the Lord said to Adam, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” There is a tree associated with the knowledge of good and evil, but creation is good and humans are good in God’s good creation.

Things change in Genesis 3. The serpent tempts Adam & Eve. He says, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Adam & Eve trust the serpent instead of God. They eat the fruit. Their eyes are opened, and God says at the end of Genesis 3, “Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil.”

They now know evil. They have done evil. Their evil spreads. Creation was good, but the Fall brought evil into God’s good creation. Things are not the way they are supposed to be. The evil spreads so rapidly that Genesis 6:5 *before* the flood says, “The Lord saw that the evil of humanity was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of the heart was only evil continually.” *After* the flood, human hearts remain evil. God says in Gen 8:21 that “the intention of a human’s heart is evil from youth.”

Humans know good and evil. Creation is still filled with the goodness of God, but now humans pursue evil. This leads to fractures between humans and other humans. It leads to fractures between humans and the earth. It leads to fractures between humans and God.

Genesis 50 ends the book of Genesis with a reminder that even though humans may *know* good and evil, only God controls good and evil. Even in the face of human sin, God can still bring about his purposes. God has decided that the Fall of humans in Genesis 3–11 is not the last word. He will bring about his good purposes.

Church, in times of fear and uncertainty, do you believe that God is still at work?

When we are in situations where we feel out of place, or when things are not as they are supposed to be, do you believe that God still works to bring good from a world that chooses evil? I confess that there are days when I feel overwhelmed by the evil of the world. There are times when I feel overcome with fear or anxiety. We still live in a fallen world, and we have fallen hearts and minds. When these doubts and fears attack us, it's best for us to remember that there have been many times in the past when it didn't seem that God was at work, but after the event, we could see clearly that God had been working through it all.

I'm reminded of the third and fourth verses of Martin Luther's famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. It says, "And though this world, with devils filled, should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed his truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure; one little word shall fell him. That Word above all earthly powers no thanks to them abideth; the Spirit and the gifts are ours through him who with us sideth. Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life also; the body they may kill: God's truth abideth still; his kingdom is forever!"

Transition: Our first section this morning focused on how God had and would preserve his chosen family despite a time of fear and anxiety. As we move to our next section, verses 22-26, we see that ...

God will fulfill his promises (Gen 50:22-26)

Read Gen 50:22-26.

Joseph trusts God's promises and entrusts his future to God and his brothers.

Notice the details of this passage.

In v. 24, Joseph announces his impending death to his brothers, and his words mirror Jacob's words to him in 46:21. Joseph tells his brothers that "God will certainly visit you," (24) as Jacob had told Joseph that "God will be with you." Joseph states that "God will bring you up ... to the land which he swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob" (24). Jacob had stated that "he will return you to the land of your fathers." The two passages are very similar. Jacob was certain that God would fulfill his promises and Jacob's certainty has become Joseph's certainty.

Joseph's statement to the brothers is what you would expect from one of Jacob's sons, but it's not what you would expect from an Egyptian lord. Such a statement would not have been acceptable in the Egyptian court.

Joseph makes the "sons of Israel" swear to his statement in v.25. He restates that God will visit them but that they will bring up his bones. His certainty includes not simply the sons' future but his future as well. Joseph looks beyond his death when he will leave Egypt and not return. He emphasizes that they will carry his bones "from here" (25). The land that he had internalized as the land of blessing in Gen 41 has become the land that he will leave. At Jacob's death, Joseph had entrusted Jacob's corpse to the Egyptians to embalm it (50:2). Someone will also embalm Joseph (50:26). But his corpse will not end with an Egyptian burial. His corpse will belong to the brothers. They will keep his bones for hundreds of years until the family returns to Canaan. In his death, Joseph associates himself with God's chosen family and God's promises to them over the riches of Egypt.

Our passage this morning ends with a summary of Joseph's death, embalming, and storage of his corpse in a coffin (26). But Genesis ends with the words "in Egypt." Moses's final depiction of Joseph presents a faith in God's promises as resilient as Jacob's faith. A faith as resilient as Abraham's faith. In fact, it is Joseph's faith in a future Exodus that the author of Hebrews highlights in the New Testament. Joseph is almost completely absent from the rest of the Bible with only a brief mention here or there. But he appears in Hebrews 11, the great passage of how faith should look like. He's not mentioned for his slavery or rise to power. He's not mentioned because of his statement about God doing good while the brothers intended evil. His faith is praised for these final words. Hebrews 11:22 reads, "By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones." The promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will come to fruition—even if the story ends with nothing more than a collection of bones in a coffin in Egypt.

[The Land Promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob](#)

Look in your Bibles at the words in vv. 24-25. Our first section this morning alluded back to Creation and the Fall with its mentions of good and evil. Our second section focuses on God's promise of Redemption.

Genesis chs. 4–11 illustrated the Fall by giving us the stories of Cain and Abel, the Flood , the continued disobedience of humans after the flood, and finally the Tower of Babel—when humans tried to make a name for themselves. In Genesis 3, God had promised a descendant of Eve who would crush the head of the serpent, but there was no sign of that descendant in these early chapters. But in Genesis 12, God chooses one human and comes into a special relationship with him. God promises him numerous descendants, a great name, and a nation associated with his descendants. God promises that kings will come from his descendants, and his descendants will rule over the Promised Land.

This individual—Abraham—is characterized by his faith. Despite all his flaws and his occasional poor decisions, God shows him mercy and promises Abraham that through him all the families of the earth will find blessing. But Abraham is not God’s chosen descendant who will crush the serpent. God speaks on multiple occasions to Abraham and gives him a miraculous child—Isaac. But Isaac, too, is not God’s chosen descendant for crushing the serpent. Isaac has two sons. His youngest son, Jacob, becomes one of the most important characters of the second half of Genesis. He factors into almost every story. But Jacob is not the promised descendant of Abraham. Jacob has twelve sons and two rise to prominence—Judah, his fourth born son, and Joseph, his eleventh born son. But neither of them are God’s chosen descendent to crush the serpent.

God used Joseph to preserve Israel and used Judah to preserve Joseph. Through Jacob, God promised Judah that he would someday reign over all his brothers and the nations. Judah died in Egypt and never reigned, but these promises looked forward to one of his descendants—the lion of the tribe of Judah.

Notice Joseph’s words in this section, he notes that the promise was to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. These are the promises of his ancestors. Stated to Abraham and reiterated to Isaac and Jacob. They will come to pass. Notice that Joseph’s brothers are referred to as the “sons of Israel.” They are not just Jacob’s sons—these are the future tribes of Israel—the nation promised to Abraham. God’s promise will come about in a future day and it will not come about in Egypt.

At the end of Genesis, things don't end like we would expect. God's chosen people are not in the promised land. God's chosen people are not numerous and don't have a great name. The promised king who would come from Judah and conquer the serpent has not come. They have been preserved by Egypt's wealth and are now living in Egypt. And that is what makes Joseph's statement at the end of the book so powerful. Despite the rejection by his brothers; Despite his previous adoption of an Egyptian lifestyle and identity; Despite the wealth and power of Egypt at his disposal.; In the end, Joseph places his faith in the Lord's promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It's a radical faith in the absence of certainty. Joseph wasn't there when God spoke to his ancestors, but he trusts God's promises to them.

Church, in times of fear and uncertainty, do you hope in the promises of the gospel?

Like the Israelites at the end of Genesis, we live between the times. God had spoken to their ancestors and provided some fulfillment of his promises. But most of their promises remained unfulfilled. The Israelites hoped in God and believed that he would fulfill his promises—even though they lived in a time of fear and uncertainty.

We, too, live in a similar place. Jesus—the chosen descendant of the line of Judah—has come. Jesus has lived a perfect life and died in the place of sinners. He has risen from the dead and promised that he will come again and bring his kingdom. We have confidence in this gospel.

We have promises that, through this gospel, we will have victory over our sin. We have promises of a future day when sin, death, and evil will be no more. We have promises of a global kingdom under Christ the king. But these promises remain unfulfilled. I still sin ... daily. Sin still reigns ... globally. Humans rule the nations and with no recognition of Christ as king. But we live in hope of a future day when Christ will return, when the dead will be raised, and when he will bring his kingdom. But now, today, we can only hope and pray—“your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We cannot always see clearly how God is at work, but we hope in the promises of the gospel.

Conclusion

We have seen from our passage this morning that ...

CPS: In times of fear and uncertainty, we should place our trust in the Lord and his promises in the gospel.

Genesis ends incomplete. It looks forward to a future day, when Israel will be in the Promised Land, when the sons of Israel will be established as a nation, under their Judahite king. This happened in the time of King David. But things still weren't right. Injustice still reigned in the world. Sin still affected human relationships. God's redemptive plan was at work, but the world was still fallen. The promises of Genesis remained unfulfilled.

The true fulfillment of Genesis's hopes began when Jesus defeated sin and death at the cross and in the empty tomb. The final fulfillment of Genesis's hopes will come when Jesus returns, judges the wicked, and establishes complete justice and righteousness—not just for Israel, but as Israel's Messiah for all the families of the earth. People of every tongue, and tribe, and nation worshipping before the throne of the Lion of Judah. Jesus ruling over his people who will have filled the earth and subdued it. God's people ruling over the birds of the sky, the fish of the sea, and everything that moves along the ground. God's people reflecting God's image to all of creation—and at the center of it all, the image of the invisible God himself—Christ our Lord. Only then, will all the hopes of Genesis find fulfillment. So today, let us hope and pray and long for that day. In times of fear and uncertainty, may we place our trust in the Lord and look forward to the future day when Christ will return and make all things new