

Message #13
Joseph

Kurt Hedlund
11/17/2024

JOSEPH, JACOB, AND THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER
GENESIS 45:16-46:34

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

Many of us are happy that the election season is finally over. The phone is ringing a little less. There are fewer annoying commercials on TV. Signs are starting to go down from people's yards. There is a little less junk mail in the mailbox. There is perhaps a little less tension with people of a different political persuasion.

Now we can look forward to wonderful things happening on the local, state, and national level. For everyone who won, as well as those who lost, promised us that great and wonderful things would happen if they were elected to office. We hope that this will be the actual outcome. Most of us recognize that it is something of a mixed bag regarding the track record of political leaders and their promises. Some of us get a bit cynical when it comes to political promises.

Some of us have had bad experiences with people who have not kept their promises to us. Some of us have had a parent or a mate who made lots of promises to us but consistently fell short. Some of us have had bad experiences with teachers or bosses or children or even church leaders. Over the course of the years I have had a number of people from outside the church who were looking for handouts. Sometimes I have provided some kind of financial help, not expecting any return. But many of them have assured me that they would pay me back, even asking me to write down my address. I only remember one person in the course of several decades who actually did. The sad reality is that all of us at one time or another have probably failed to deliver on promises that we have made.

How great it would be to have a relationship with a friend or a boss or a relative who followed through on his or her promises 100% of the time! Our story today is about such a promise keeper. Four thousand years ago God told a Middle Easterner named Abram to go to the land of Canaan. He promised to make of Abram a great nation. He promised to give his descendants the land of Canaan. He promised that through Abram all of the world would be blessed.

The probability for the fulfillment of those promises looked bleak in those early years. Abram moved to the land of Canaan and found it occupied by idol worshipers. He could not find a real estate agent willing to sell him property in Canaan. More importantly his wife seemed unable to bear children. Finally, miraculously, in their old age Abram, who was renamed by God "Abraham," and his wife did have a son.

Abraham's son Isaac had only two children. God said that His promises to Abraham would be fulfilled in the younger one, Jacob. We have seen from our study in recent

weeks that Jacob had twelve sons. But this family was divided. It looked like they were going to be sucked up by the surrounding pagan culture.

Then the Lord used a dream to promise son #11, Joseph, that all of his family would one day bow down to him. Shortly after that the jealous brothers sold Joseph as a slave. Joseph for the next thirteen years became the one who was bowing down to others. After serving as a slave in the house of Potiphar, perhaps the top military official in Egypt, Joseph ended up in prison. But Joseph chose to believe in the promises of the Great Promise Keeper.

Last week we saw some of the results of that faith in God. Today we are going to see more of those results. Hopefully we will learn something about what it means to trust in the promises of God, especially in the face of difficult circumstances.

I.

First of all, in vv. 16-28 of #45, we shall find that TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER PRODUCES BLESSING. (PROJECTOR ON--- I. TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER...) Last time we saw that Joseph, who had become the Egyptian prime minister, revealed himself at last to his brothers who had come to Egypt seeking grain. There was repentance. There was reconciliation. There was a grand reunion.

News of this reunion and the presence of Joseph's brothers in Egypt reached the pharaoh. This ruler of Egypt had a very positive response. In fact, he ordered Joseph to have his family moved to Egypt, to the land of Goshen (GOSHEN MAP), which was probably in the eastern part of the Nile River delta. Pharaoh knew from Joseph's interpretation of the pharaoh's dream and the subsequent events that had come to prove its validity that there were five more years of famine to come.

So the pharaoh vowed to give Joseph's family the "best" of the land. The pharaoh also said that this family should eat of the fat of the land. The king of Egypt wanted this family to receive the royal treatment.

This was amazing treatment to give to a small clan of foreigners, to a bunch of semi-nomads from the wilderness of Canaan. Why did he do it? What was his motivation? The pharaoh gave this treatment to the clan of Jacob out of love, honor, and respect for Joseph. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Joseph had been called out of his dungeon to interpret the dream of the king when no one else had been able to do it. He predicted that seven years of abundance would come upon the land of Egypt, which would be followed by seven years of famine. Joseph also made specific suggestions as to how to use the abundance of the good years to prepare for the coming bad years. The pharaoh had bought Joseph's interpretation. Joseph was made prime minister. His plans for preparation were followed. The seven years of abundance came just as he predicted. Now they were into the second or third year of the famine.

The pharaoh was smart enough to see that Joseph had delivered his country from a heap of trouble. His actions toward Joseph's family were an expression of appreciation toward Joseph. The pharaoh may also have thought that if his family was anything like Joseph, they would be an asset to his kingdom.

The point is this: Because of Joseph's trust in the promises of God, he had become a source of blessing. One of the promises which God gave Abraham back in #12 was that through Abraham and his descendants all of the nations of the world would be blessed. The ultimate fulfillment of that promise came with Christ. But here with Joseph we see a partial fulfillment of God's intended purpose for the Hebrew people. Joseph had become a blessing to the Egyptians.

At age 17 Joseph had his dream where God promised that he would play a special role in God's plan. After Joseph revealed that dream to his brothers, they sold him into slavery. But Joseph believed in the promise of God. Because of that he became a source of blessing wherever he went. In the household of Potiphar, the captain of the bodyguard, he became chief executive servant. Everything entrusted to his care prospered. When Potiphar's wife framed him and had him sent to prison because he resisted her advances, Joseph still trusted God. The jailer ended up making him his chief assistant, and everything prospered under his care. Now as prime minister of the entire country, Joseph is a blessing to the entire nation.

In the face of some very difficult circumstances Joseph could have chosen to be a bitter young man. Instead he chose to trust the Great Promise Keeper and thus became a blessing. The challenge for all of us is this: Am I a source of blessing? In the adversities of life that come my way, am I still trusting God and His promises? If I am, then I can be confident that I will be a source of blessing.

One of the dear saints which we have had in our church was Marie Griffin. She lived to be, I think, 103 years old. Several years before that on one of my visits she was talking about how she wanted to go to the park in the summer and pass out some evangelistic flyers to children. It was not really realistic, given her health condition, but I appreciated how she was not focused on her challenging health situation but rather on how she might be a blessing to others.

In vv. 21-23 Joseph follows the orders of Pharaoh and gathers up new clothes and money and donkeys and grain and carts to send off to his father and the rest of his extended family. Joseph's trust in the Great Promise Keeper, you see, also results in blessing to his family.

Before Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan, he warns them not to argue on the way. The brothers not only are going to have to tell their father the good news about Joseph, but also they are going to have to come clean about what really happened to him. They are going to have to explain that they sold their brother into slavery over twenty years ago, and they have been lying about it ever since. This presents the

danger of brothers playing the blame game, of minimizing individual guilt and trying to pass it on to others. Fortunately that does not seem to happen.

When the brothers get back home and tell their father Jacob the story, he is stunned. For about 22 years Jacob was convinced that Joseph was dead. Verse 26 indicates that he did not believe the story at first. His sons had been lying to him for all of this time.

But now Jacob had to believe this report before he could enjoy the abundance that awaited him in Egypt. He had heard his son describe his special dream at age 17. But Jacob had not trusted in the promise of God. Frequently he had failed to trust other promises of God. Because of that failure to trust God's promises his family had suffered. But now as Jacob began to see all of the great wealth that his sons had brought with him, he had to accept the truth. Wagons were largely unknown in Canaan at this time. Seeing this Egyptian wagons loaded with good things made the father believe the story of his sons. Thus he concluded in v. 28 that Joseph was alive.

Notice also one slight change in v. 28. Jacob is now called Israel. Usually in the story of Joseph when Jacob is living without much trust in God, he is called "Jacob." But when he is trusting in the promises of God, he is "Israel."

Jacob was a genuine believer in the God of his father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham. But for much of Jacob's life there was little trust in God or His promises. Jacob used deceit. He displayed blatant favoritism toward some of his sons. He operated on the basis of the principle that the end justifies the means.

We Christians can be like that. We have truly trusted in Jesus and are headed for heaven. But we buy into the values and methodologies of the world around us and live too often like we don't believe in God.

This way of being had negative effects on Jacob's family. It produced jealousy and hatred and separation and disunity. Because of his failure to trust God, Jacob was not much of a blessing to anyone. He also suffered personally because of it. Those around him suffered. But now he makes a decision to trust in the truth. Because of that he will begin to enjoy the fruits of trusting the Great Promise Keeper.

Joni Eareckson Tada was an energetic, vibrant teenager when adversity struck her life. She was paralyzed in a tragic swimming accident. As a result she was left a quadriplegic. She went through a typical period of depression and confusion. But she was a Christian, and in the end she chose to believe the promise of God that He has a plan and a good purpose for every believer's life.

Thus she became a blessing. (PROJECTOR ON--- JONI EARECKSON TADA) She writes and paints--- with her teeth. She has a radio program. She speaks at conferences around the country. She advocates for disability rights. She encourages the handicapped, and she encourages all people to trust in the promises of God. In the

midst of the adversities of life the Lord also desires us to trust in the promises of God. As we do that, we will be a blessing to others.

II.

(II. TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER...) From the first 27 verses of #46 we learn that TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER REQUIRES RECOGNITION OF HIS GENUINE PROMISES. Verse 1 indicates that the Jacob clan left Hebron and headed south and west toward Egypt. Along the way they stopped in Beersheba. (BEERSHEBA MAP 2) Jacob was probably aware that his grandfather Abraham had worshipped God once in this place. His father Isaac had also received a revelation from God here where the Lord had assured Isaac that his descendants would become a great nation. In response Isaac had built an altar and worshiped God.

Given the great news that Jacob had just received and the memories of the worship of his ancestors in this place, Jacob also chose to worship God. Jacob probably had mixed feelings about going to Egypt. He knew that his grandfather Abraham got into trouble when he went down to Egypt to avoid a famine. He also knew that his father Isaac had planned to go down to Egypt to avoid another famine. The Lord then appeared to him, saying, **“Do not go down to Egypt; stay in the land of which I shall tell you.”** Canaan, after all, was the land which had been promised to these patriarchs. Jacob was an old man. It was difficult to pull up stakes and move to an entirely new country and culture.

Then there was also one word that the Lord had given to Abraham, of which Jacob may have been aware. In #15 v. 13 of Genesis (GENESIS 15:13) God told Jacob’s grandfather, **“Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years.”** Could this prophecy be involved with Jacob’s move? With these questions and doubts on Jacob’s mind, it was very helpful to receive the revelation from God recorded in vv. 2-4 of our text in #46. The Lord assured him that this was the right thing to do and that his descendants would grow into a great nation in Egypt.

In v. 4 the Lord says to Jacob (PROJECTOR OFF), **“I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”** This was not the land of ultimate promise. This was a land of idol worshippers. This was a land that would eventually put Jacob’s descendants into slavery. But this was where God wanted him to go, and Jacob and his family had the promise that God would go with them.

When we believers are carrying on with the mission that God has for us, sometimes we find ourselves in strange places and in difficult situations. We find ourselves confronted with problems. But if we are walking according to God’s revealed will, we, too, can be confident that God will go with us.

At the end of the Gospel According to Matthew Jesus told His disciples go into the world and make disciples of all of the nations. He concluded this exhortation with the promise

(PROJECTOR ON--- MATTHEW 28:20): **“I am with you always, to the end of the age.”** If we are following God’s directions, we can be confident that God will be with us.

So Jacob and his family arrive in Egypt. There is a listing provided for us of all of the family members who are involved in this move. We are told that the total number is 70. The people listed here will become leaders of the clans of the nation of Israel.
(PROJECTOR OFF)

This move was a big step for Jacob. Canaan was the land of promise, not Egypt. There were contradictory signals that Jacob might have looked at to determine what was right. He needed clear direction from the Lord, and He did get it.

In the various situations of life that come our way, there are decisions we must make where the right thing to do, or the best thing to do, may seem unclear. Circumstances may seem to be against us. The leading of the Lord may seem to be unclear. In these situations if we want to make decisions that are pleasing to the Lord, we must above all else make sure that those choices we are considering are within the revealed will of God. If specific Scriptures or principles of the Bible go against a particular option, then we need to drop it. After that we need to rely on general principles of wisdom. If a choice we make does not go against the Bible, we don’t need to worry about God being upset with us.

The problem is that Christians as well as non-Christians often cling to promises that God has not made. We consciously or unconsciously assume that God has promised that cancer and death and car accidents and job losses will happen to other people and not ourselves. When these adversities of life do come along, we are tempted to get mad at God. We may become disillusioned.

Sometimes we get impressions or sense a certain peace about a particular course of action, and we take that as a promise from God. Sometimes that course of action doesn’t work out, and we wonder what happened. We are on much more solid ground when we claim as promises only those things that we find in the revealed Word of God. So we would do well to learn what those promises are, and that comes only from studying the Bible.

Every few years someone comes along claiming that God has shown them from the Bible that Christ is coming back at such and such a time. The last person of some prominence to say that was Harold Camping, the president of Family Radio. In 2005 he claimed from his study of the Bible that the rapture of the church would occur on May 21, 2011. This would be followed by plagues and other judgments upon the earth which would culminate in the destruction of the world on October 21, 2011. He claimed that this was the promise of God. Of course, he was wrong, and many of his followers were left disillusioned. We need to be careful to discern what the promises of God really are.

III.

Consider then vv. 28-34 of #46 which teaches us that **TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER LEADS TO A RECOGNITION OF HIS SOVEREIGN PLAN.** (PROJECTOR ON--- TRUST IN THE GREAT PROMISE KEEPER....) Before the family arrives in Goshen in the eastern Nile delta, Jacob sends Judah on ahead to find the best route. Judah has begun to take on a leadership role in the family. The son who took the lead in selling Joseph to traders going down to Egypt is now taking the lead in bringing the family down to Egypt. But Judah is a changed man. He now has his father's confidence. This has symbolic significance because the tribe of Judah will come to have a dominant role in Israel. It will be through Judah's descendants that the Messiah will one day come.

Finally in v. 29 the reunion between Joseph and his father takes place. It is an emotional scene. In v. 30 Jacob indicates that now he is ready to die. When he believed that Joseph was dead, he had no peace. But now that he sees him alive, Jacob feels ready to die in peace.

We find out later that Jacob lived for 17 more years. That was the same length of time that Jacob had known his son before Joseph was sold into slavery. It was almost as long as the time that Joseph had been separated from his family.

At the end of the chapter Joseph has to deal with a delicate political and social situation. The Egyptians have a kind of caste system. Shepherds, which is what Jacob's family members were, lay at the bottom of the social ladder. The last clause of the chapter says, **"...for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."**

So Joseph explains to his family that he will talk to Pharaoh first. Then when they are questioned, they are to give honest answer about their means of livelihood. They are to do that in a deferential way. Thus the family comes to live in Goshen.

Goshen was to be an ideal place for them to live. It was close to the capital where Joseph was. So he could continue to keep in contact with them. Being in the midst of the various streams that comprised the Nile Delta, it was also somewhat isolated. That would serve the dual purpose of keeping the Egyptians from being offended by contact with the Hebrews, and it would protect the Hebrews from being absorbed by the Egyptian people. It was also reasonably close to Canaan. When the time came to leave, the distance to the Promised Land would be relatively short.

All of these events that had touched on the life of Joseph and his family were part of an all-wise plan that God had for His people. By bringing this chosen family to Egypt the Lord was fulfilling prophecy that He made to Abraham. By bringing them to Egypt this family would be protected from being absorbed by a pagan culture. For the Egyptians had an aversion to shepherds. By locating Jacob's family in the fertile Nile River Delta they would have an ideal location to have a dependable supply of water and grazing land for their flocks. By being situated in the midst of an advanced civilization they would have opportunity to pick up the technology and learning that reflected the greatest advances of human society. By putting them in the midst of a larger and

obviously stronger nation the Lord was setting them up for a period of bondage. But in the end he was also setting them up for a miraculous deliverance, which would display God's awesome power to His people and to the watching world.

It is impossible to know just how much of this all-wise plan Jacob's family understood. Probably Joseph understood more of it than anyone else. But for much of his life he had a very limited understanding of the overall picture. All that he had to go on was the promises of God. Because he clung to those promises, he became a source of blessing, and he was an instrument through which God accomplished His purposes.

Edith Schaeffer, the wife of the late Frances Schaeffer, liked to compare life to a tapestry, to a beautiful rug. We Christians usually see only the back side of that tapestry (TAPESTRY BACK), and often what we see doesn't make a lot of sense. But God sees the other side and he knows that in the end the plan that He has for our lives will be woven into a beautiful picture. (TAPESTRY FRONT) Our responsibility is to obey Him and to trust in His promises.

We Christians have an assurance about this good, sovereign plan. In the New Testament book of Romans in #8 v. 28 the Apostle Paul (ROMANS 8:28) writes, "**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.**" God has a plan for this life, and we are part of it. The question is: Will we be more like Jacob or Joseph? Will we trust in the promises of God, even when our circumstances make no sense to us, or will we depend upon our own devices like Jacob so often did?

We live in the midst of a society that stresses immediate gratification. (PROJECTOR OFF) Our culture encourages us to find quick solutions to our problems, to satisfy our needs and our wants right away. So when the pink slip comes, when the job offer doesn't come through, when our romantic overture is rejected, when our candidate doesn't get elected, when we don't make the sale, when the blood test indicates a problem, we are tempted to panic. We are tempted to rely upon our own devices. We doubt God.

One of the lessons from Joseph's life is that believers need to take the long view. The Lord does not usually work as fast as we would like Him to work. Trials are frequently included in His plan for our lives. But when we trust in the promises of God, He will use us, and we will be a source of blessing to others.

In C. S. Lewis's book *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* Mr. Beaver describes the might and majesty of Aslan the lion who is a symbol of Christ in the story. Lucy asks Mr. Beaver, "**Is--- is he safe?**" Mr. Beaver replies, "**Safe? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the king I tell you.**"

Do you believe that about Jesus Christ? In the midst of the adversities of life will we choose to trust in His promises? Will we believe that He has a good and wise plan for us?