

Genesis 50

With this chapter we conclude the book of Genesis. Even so, we are reminded that Genesis is merely the beginning of God's work to restore humanity to its original state of living in right relationship with God, with each other and with creation.

Chapter 50 is composed of two stories. The first is the story of the funeral for and burial of Jacob. At the end of the previous chapter, Jacob asked all his sons (in one strand of tradition) and Joseph (in another strand of tradition) to bury him not in Egypt but in the Land of Promise. The writer ultimately chooses the tradition that has Joseph conduct the burial rites. The burial rites appear to mark Jacob as an Egyptian. He is embalmed and mourned over by the Egyptian people. Following the official mourning period, Joseph asks permission of Pharaoh to take the body back to its final resting place in Canaan. And even though there are multiple Egyptians who accompany Joseph and his brothers (and the body) back to Canaan and mourn over Jacob again in the Land of Promise, it becomes clear that Jacob does not want to be seen as an Egyptian. He chose instead to be buried in the land that God had promised to his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac. Jacob is, even in death, one who believes in the Promise of God that his family will be blessed by God with land, offspring and blessing. Thus, his burial is an act of witness to God's promises.

The second half of the chapter deals with the final healing of the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. As a reminder, the brothers who were jealous of Joseph because he was their father's favorite, sold Joseph into slavery. Their first reunion was not overly successful. The outcome of the final reunion however seemed to have been one of forgiveness and reconciliation. Joseph even had his brothers and their families move to Egypt. Regardless, the brothers worried that with their father dead and buried, Joseph will take his revenge. Being the kind of people that they were, rather than simply asking for forgiveness, they concoct a plan to guilt Joseph into forgiving them. The plan was to tell Joseph that their father Jacob, as a last wish, wanted Joseph to forgive them. When Joseph weeps at this story, it causes the brothers to weep as well and fall down before Joseph acknowledging that they are his slaves/servants, meaning he can do with them as he pleases.

Joseph's response has become one of the most quoted statements in the Bible. "You meant it for evil, God meant it for good." With this line, Joseph not only offers forgiveness, but he reaffirms his belief in the Promise of God, that this family has a special destiny. The chapter ends with Joseph's death and his request that he, like his father, not be buried in Egypt, but that when God brings the people back to Canaan, his bones go with them (which will happen in the book of Exodus).

Reflection: The story in Genesis is not simply a tale of long, long ago. It is our story. It is our story because as the Apostle Paul puts it, we Gentiles (meaning non-Jews) have been grafted into the story through our faith in Jesus Christ. This means that we are Promise bearers. We are those who are part of a world-wide family, whose purpose is to not only bear witness to God's ongoing promise of reconciliation and blessing, but are to live in the hope and confidence of that Promise. Thus we, like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, are to trust that God's often hidden work in the world is leading us to new life and away for death.

Questions:

1. What is your favorite part of Genesis and why?
2. What do you make of Joseph's claim that while the brothers meant their actions for evil, God meant them for good?
3. How are you living as a person of the Promise?