



Study #6 Joseph part 3 Genesis 48-50

Introduction

In these 3 chapters Moses draws the book Genesis to a close. We've come a long way since the beginning of the book of Genesis. If we think about narrative arcs, the Joseph story (which has its own narrative arc) is nestled within a much greater story. Genesis has begun with the LORD God creating the heavens and the earth and has ended with the story of Joseph. In other words, there's a sense in which the Joseph story is the resolution to this one big story that comprises the whole book of Genesis. Let's keep this in mind as we look at these final chapters of the book.

Read the following key verses and discuss the way in which you see them fitting with:

1. The Joseph narrative arc
2. The more expansive and wider whole-Genesis narrative arc

45:5-8

5 And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. 6 For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. 7 And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for

you many survivors. 8 So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

50:15-21

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "It may be that Joseph will hate us and pay us back for all the evil that we did to him." 16 So they sent a message to Joseph, saying, "Your father gave this command before he died: 17 'Say to Joseph, "Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin, because they did evil to you."' And now, please forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of your father." Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 His brothers also came and fell down before him and said, "Behold, we are your servants." 19 But Joseph said to them, "Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? 20 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. 21 So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

The threat to the wonderful promise of Genesis 3:15 has been ever present in the book of Genesis. (infertility, family conflict, sibling rivalry, flagrant wickedness etc). Read the above 2 passages once again. What do these verses tell us concerning the threats to the promise and how these threats have been averted?

Chapter 48

In 48:1-7 we observe a solemn moment where Jacob blesses Joseph's sons. In verses 3-4 Jacob refers to an earlier moment in his life when he met with the living God. (35:6-15).

1. To what extent does Jacob see the earlier promises being fulfilled as he speaks with Joseph? (see also 48:15-16)
2. In 48:12-22 Jacob blesses Joseph's two sons but not according to their birth order (see 41:50-52, 48:5- 6). Where else in Genesis have

we seen the birth order of sons being reversed?

Chapter 49

In chapter 49, Jacob calls his 12 sons and blesses each of them in turn, speaking of their future. The significance of the fact that Jacob blesses all 12 sons should not be lost on us (49:28). This contrasts with the family line of descendents that we've seen throughout the book of Genesis up to this point. It is no longer only through one of the family line that the Abrahamic promises are to continue. Given all that has happened since chapter 37, we might have expected the promises to continue through Joseph and on to his descendents. However this is not the case. The promise that looks forwards to the one who will crush the serpent's head from this point forwards, will be picked up not by the one but by all 12 sons of Jacob. The reconciliation that Joseph has worked with his brothers is an essential and necessary foundation to this.

However there is a notable surprise in the moment when Jacob blesses Judah in 49:8-12 especially when we think back to the events described in Genesis 38. The prior chapters of Genesis have led us to expect a narrowing to take place following the line of Joseph and his sons. After all, through Joseph we've already seen God's blessing to the world (41:57).

This may explain how Genesis 38 functions in the book of Genesis as a whole. Rather than see the Judah/Tamar incident as an interruption to the narrative flow, Moses is deliberately inviting us to compare Judah with Joseph. (In both instances there is a goat of the flock involved. Both brothers are confronted with sexual temptation. Both brothers have 2 sons whose birth order is reversed)

3. What are the key elements of Jacob's blessing of Judah?

To see how these promises are picked up in both the Old & New Testaments read the following verses: Psalm 78:65-72, Micah 5:2 quoted in Matthew 2:6, Matthew 1:3, Luke 3:33-34

The fact that we're told that brothers' descendants will bow down to Judah reminds us of the earlier days of Joseph (Compare 49:8 with Joseph's dream of chapter 37). It would seem that the repentant, future descendent of Judah will be cast in the mold of Joseph. The one to come in the line of Judah will rule in the same way that Joseph has done.

4. To what extent do you think that the forgiveness and reconciliation that Joseph achieved points to the Lord Jesus?

In chapter 24 of the book of Numbers Balaam is tasked by the king of Moab, Balak with cursing the people of Israel. Rather than curse the people of promise, Balaam announces blessings in a series of oracles. Speaking of what Israel will do to Moab "...in the latter days." (Numbers 24:14), Balaam prophesies:

*I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near:
a star shall come out of Jacob,
and a scepter shall rise out of Israel;
it shall crush the forehead of Moab
and break down all the sons of Sheth.*
Numbers 24:17

Could this be an oblique reference to the crushing of the serpent's head from Genesis 3:15?

Drawing the threads together

Throughout the whole Joseph cycle there have been explicit and implicit threats to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. Can you list some of these?

The final chapter of Genesis is no exception.

5. How might the moment when the brothers fear retribution from Joseph be a threat to the promises (50:15). In what way do we see this threat averted?

Let's stand back and think about all that has taken place between Genesis 1:1 and 50:26. Who could have imagined, given how the book starts with God speaking the heavens and the earth into existence, that this is how Moses would complete the book of Genesis? Hopefully this gives us important insight into Moses' project - the primeval story giving rise to the patriarchal story. It's important for us not to sever the connection between these two. Textual and thematic linkages between the primeval and patriarchal history, attests to an essential and unbroken unity to the Genesis story. From the point of view of the Israelite reader of Genesis, the message would have been clear: the story of our origins in the LORD God's promises made to Abraham is what forges our identity as the people of God (the story of the patriarchs). However this story is nestled into an even greater story (the creation of the world followed by the Fall - the primeval story). The Lord God's response to a world under the curse of sin will be to choose one man through whom He will work to restore all things. It is through Abraham and his seed that blessing will come to the whole world.

Cosmic beginnings and Israel's national beginnings are thus tied together theologically as one story in Genesis. Abraham and the nation Israel serve as the means of salvation for all humanity, indeed for the entire cosmos.

Of course although Genesis 50:26 is the end of the book of Genesis, this is not the end of the story - Genesis is only the first of 5 books that make up the Pentateuch. Genesis has prepared us for what will be the next stage of the fulfillment of God's great promises to Abraham.

Conclusion

Joseph's importance in the book of Genesis is evident from the amount of airplay that Moses gives to his story. And yet in the light of our study we see that Joseph is not the bearer of the promise. It is not through his family line that the promises to Abraham will find their fulfillment. In Joseph there is resolution to the book of Genesis. However we are still left with questions about how the Abrahamic promises will ultimately be fulfilled. And if Joseph is not the bearer of the promise in the same way that his forefathers were, what then is his role in the book? Why his prominence in the book of Genesis? Especially in the light of the fact that the rest of the Bible speaks so little about him?

Partial answers to these questions:

"Moses focuses on Joseph to highlight God's sovereign faithfulness to his covenantal promises. God uses Joseph to turn back the effects of the curse and accomplish, in part, his promises to Abraham."

"Joseph anticipates a coming Joseph who will finally reverse the curse and fulfill the promises. Joseph's story is the story of the whole Bible. It is the story of glory through suffering, exaltation through humiliation. It is the story of the cross and the crown." Samuel Emadi, From Prisoner to Prince - the Joseph Story in biblical theology., p 149

- Praise God for the way He so perfectly works out his plan for this world by the ones that He has chosen. We see this so clearly in the book of Genesis.
- Praise Him for the wonder of the Son who so truly and completely fulfils God's promises.
- How exciting it is to know that we are not left in the dark about what God has been doing all along through the unfolding story that the Bible tells! He is so faithful in keeping His promises.