

The sovereignty of God and election

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[0 : 00] Today's reading is taken from Genesis chapter 39, which can be found on page 50 of the Church Bibles. Then Jacob called his sons and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in the days to come.

Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob. Listen to Israel, your father. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength.

Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it.

He went up to my couch. Simon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council. O my glory, be not joined to their company.

For in their anger they killed men, and in their wilfulness they humstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel.

[1 : 05] I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. Judah, your brothers shall praise you. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies, and your father's sons shall bow down before you.

Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down. He crouched as a lion and as a lioness. Who dares rouse him?

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him. And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Biding his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine, and his vesture in the blood of grapes.

His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea. He shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon.

Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant. So he bowed his shoulders to bear, and became a servant at forced labour.

[2 : 18] Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backwards.

I wait for your salvation, O Lord. Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies.

Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful forms. Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring. His branches run over the wall.

The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely. Yet his bow remained unmoved. His arms were made agile by the hands of the mighty one of Jacob.

From there is the shepherd, the son of the stone of Israel. By the God of your father who will help you, by the almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breast and of the womb.

[3 : 20] The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil. All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with a blessing suitable to him.

Then he commanded them and said to them, I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place.

There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebecca his wife. And there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.

When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people. Thank you, Paul. Great. Good.

[4 : 34] Well, do keep that passage open, and we'll get into it. Now, this is the last in our series on Joseph. I hope you've enjoyed it. I have. I've learnt loads.

I love teaching the Bible. I learn more than you do, probably. And one of the things I'd like to do, if we've got a bit of time afterwards, is to take some questions on anything I say tonight, or this morning. I'm used to preaching in the evening.

This morning. And if there's any questions from anything else that's gone on in the series, I'd love to take questions, because questions get answers, and that's how we learn. So it's a good thing to ask questions. Well, today's passage is, or text, is a long one.

We're actually looking at, from chapters 46 through to 50 to the end, as the last five chapters. And, of course, we're not going to do them all in great depth and detail. But, essentially, this is the story of the finishing of Genesis.

Exodus, the next book, starts off with the Israelites in Egypt. And it's the story of the Exodus as they leave Egypt. So this is the story of how they get to Egypt and why they're in Egypt.

[5 : 32] Jacob is brought with his 70 sons. There's a big, explicit 70 sons. Because God has brought them there in the midst of a famine, and he's given them food, and he's provided for them. And they're living in Goshen, which is this beautiful, leafy, it's described as a fat land.

I like that word. It's comfortable, it's juicy, it's got everything you need. And it's protection in the midst of a famine. So they've got everything there. And yet, and yet, and yet, that's not the end of the story because they know that one day they're going to be going back to the land that they're really from.

Have a look at chapter 46, verse 1. What Helen said earlier was really very, very helpful to what we're looking at in today's talk.

Today's talk is very much about the promises of God. And if you were to go through all the patriarchs in Genesis that I've done with some detail this week, looking at Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, at various points in their life, God visited them, either in person or in a dream, and he gave them promises.

And what we have here in chapter 46, verse 1, is the last promise God explicitly gives to the patriarchs. This is very important. Let me read it from verse 1 of chapter 46. So Israel, that's Jacob, took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

[6 : 52] And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, here am I. Then he said, I am God. The God of your father, do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I'll make of you into a great nation.

I myself will go down with you into Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes. Now, the big point of this talk really is that God is a God of promises, as Helen was saying earlier.

He makes promises to us through the gospel of Jesus, just as he made promises to the patriarchs, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And let me, if we can get the thing going.

Go on, son. Oh, we've lost it. It's a bit slow. Apologies. Oh, I think I've lost it. Okay, don't worry. Let me tell you about the promises we've got in to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Sorry this isn't working at the moment. If you want to keep your finger in 46 and go back to Genesis 12, I'll just quickly show you them.

[7 : 59] Helen alluded to them earlier. Let me read from Genesis 12, verse 1.

Now, the Lord said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you, and I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of earth shall be blessed. Now, this sums up most of the promises that God makes to Abraham, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Let me show you them. First of all, he's going to make him into a great nation. At that point, he hasn't got any kids. He's going to have loads of kids. Later on, God describes it as like dust on the

earth or like stars in the sky or like sand on the seashore.

So you'll have a great nation that will come from you. Secondly, he says, I will bless you and make your name great, bless you and curse those who dishonour you. So it seems that, and it will come through his offspring, as you'd see in other promises, that if you love and follow Abraham and particularly his offspring, then you'll be blessed by God.

[9 : 11] But if you hate Abraham and particularly his offspring, if you're against him and his offspring, then you'll be the subject of God's curse. And that comes for fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, who he's Abraham's offspring.

And thirdly, all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you. At some stage in the future, through Abraham and particularly through his offspring, all kinds of people from every nation, tribe and tongue, even English people, will be blessed through Abraham and through his offspring.

And look over to verse 7 as well. Then the Lord appeared to Abraham and said, to your offspring, I will give this land. And that's the other great promise. They'll have the land to live in.

So it's the things that Helen said there. There'll be a great people and it'll be a blessing to all the people of the earth. There'll be a land and there'll also be blessing. If you love Abraham, if you follow his offspring, there'll be blessing.

The only other promise that isn't in those promises is the one we've just read back in chapter 46. The promise that they'll go down to Egypt and that God will rescue them and bring them back to the land because that's part of God's promise.

[10 : 18] They'll have an everlasting land. So those are the promises. Now the important thing about the promises of God is that they're given by grace. They're promises. A promise to give you something isn't a promise to give you something if you give me something back.

It's a promise by grace. And we'll be coming back to that later on. But my first point and we want to think about while they're in Egypt waiting to go back to the promised land is what it's like to live in hope in a foreign land.

Living in hope in a foreign land. I've switched our points around on the back of the sheet. You might be able to follow through on the sheet. So I've switched the two points around number one and number two. So this first theme is living in hope in a promised land.

When Jacob and his 70 sons if you like and grandsons get to Egypt Joseph has got a plan on exactly where he wants them to live in Egypt. And he tells his father and his brothers when you go and visit Pharaoh tell them you're shepherds.

And the reason you want to tell them they're shepherds is because the Egyptians don't like shepherds. They find them abominable. And that way you'll get a really good spot to live away from the Egyptians. Have a look at chapter 46 and verse 33.

[11 : 27] 46-33. Joseph when Pharaoh calls you and says what is your occupation you shall say your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now both we and our fathers in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.

So that's exactly what they do. They're going to Pharaoh they say hi Pharaoh we'd like to live in your land if that's alright. Oh and by the way we're shepherds. Oh okay you shepherds why don't you live in Goshen seeing as that where you are at the moment nicely far away from us and that's good for us.

Now that's good for two reasons. The first reason that's really good is because Goshen is a really plush spot. Okay. Goshen is like the dullage of ancient Egypt.

Okay. It was leafy it was green it was fat land as I said earlier. So it's a good place to live. But secondly it was away from many of the Egyptians and particularly away from the Egyptian gods. Later on Israel will start worshipping the Egyptian gods because they get intermingled with the Egyptians and they start loving the things the Egyptians love. And what Joseph is wanting his family to do here and Jacob is to live apart from the Egyptians so they won't love their gods and bow down to their idols and become just like the Egyptians just like the nations if you like.

[12 : 50] Now this theme of living in a land of exile waiting to go back to the land is used in the New Testament a lot. It's a common theme throughout the Bible and when it's applied to us in the New Testament it's applied to us because in a sense we are living in exile.

You might not have realised this you might actually be not from England and you feel like someone living in exile but you might be English and you think well I'm from London I'm from London. But the

New Testament tells us that we're actually if you're a Christian you're a citizen of heaven. You might be a citizen of the UK but your real home is with God and one day when the Lord Jesus returns and we're all raised from the dead and he renews our earth and ruins all death and suffering and evil and wickedness then we'll be home.

I can't wait to see your guys' eyes when you see wow we're home this is home. And so the New Testament encourages us to think of where we are now not as home as an exile as a place a good fat land Goshen Dulwich if you like but where we're really going back to is the new heavens and the new earth the new creation that's our real home that's where we belong.

And so whilst they're waiting for that hope to happen whilst they're waiting to go back to the land Joseph, Jacob and his family they live separately from the Egyptians because they don't want to get merged in with the Egyptians and love the gods that they love.

[14:15] And so it is with us actually the New Testament that makes this an important thing. In a men's ministry meeting we had this week we were thinking about idolatry and idols and now in our culture we don't have statue idols on corners or temples everywhere that all the people in our nation go and worship at but there are idols the idols of our culture are things that that take the place of God.

If you think of God as the number one thing in your life if something else becomes more important than God and takes the place of God that has become an idol a God above God. So if there's something in your life that takes the first place in your affections in your fears in your desires in your hopes in your dependence where you get your security where you go when times are tough if you look for salvation for rescue for identity in something other than God then effectively that thing has become an idol and I take it you've learnt that from the nations around us from the people amongst whom we live.

And our culture we were talking about this on Thursday a great place to see what the idols of our culture are is to go to WH Smith's it's not like they've got little statues in WH Smith's but if you go and look at the magazine racks you just see all the idols of our culture the things that people worship and have affection for and desire and fear clothes or fashion or beauty or gadgets or computer stuff or houses or sports or finance or sex or celebrity or family or education or career these are all good things that can become too important to us in our lives and therefore become idols things that we worship above God.

Now you see Jacob in his family they wanted to live separately from the Egyptians in a separate place so they wouldn't become influenced by the idols but we live in a different era Jesus has sent us into the world to live amongst the people in our culture we're not to live separately from them and yet and yet we're not to worship their idols we're not to love what they love fear what they fear desire what they desire hope in what they hope in and I wonder if you have fallen into in your heart I won't spend long on this but some form of idolatry something you hope for something you love something you wait for something you trust in above God and Jacob and his family would be an encouragement to us don't do that don't fall into that mistake and the best way to do that is longing for a return to the land long for a return to the land that's what they did let me show you how they lived their lives in Egypt but they didn't really think of Egypt as their home they really wanted to go back to Israel just as we should be living in this land thinking what I really want to be is at home with God in the new creation and the actually striking way this is shown up is in their deaths so have a look at chapter 47 verse 29 on page 49 in my one here 47 29 this is

Jacob giving instructions about his death 29 when the time when the time drew near that Israel that's Jacob must die he called his son Joseph to him and said if now I found favour in your sight put your hand under my thigh that's a way of swear on your life promise and promise to deal kindly and truly with me do not bury me in Egypt but let me lie with my fathers carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burying place and he answered I will do as you have said and actually later on in chapter 50 you get a long long description of the burial of Jacob back in Israel Jacob doesn't think he's from Egypt his heart his life is back tied up with the land that's where he wants to be buried have a look over at chapter 50 verse 24 right at the very end the last three verses of the book this is Joseph giving instructions about his death Joseph said to his brothers

[18:25] I'm about to die but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land that he swore to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob there he is trusting in the hope of the promises of God for return then Joseph made the sons of Israel swear saying surely God will visit you and you shall carry up my bones from here so Joseph died and they embalmed him and put him in a coffin in Egypt and at

the end of the book of Joshua when the later generations go back to Israel there's a big description of how they take Joseph's bones and they bury them in Israel because even though he's lived most of his life in Egypt he doesn't come from there his heart where he belongs is back in the land and so for us our heart where we belong is not here this is great okay this is Goshen Dulwich is Goshen it's a fat and happy land we're very blessed of God we've got lots to be thankful to God for most of us have got food on the table we've got enough money in the bank we've got a roof over our head we've got clothing on our back we've got family we've got friends we've got lots of great stuff we live in a fat happy land but this is not the ultimate end this is not where we belong our hearts belong in the new creation that's where we belong

I'd like you to keep your finger in Genesis and very quickly turn to Hebrews in the New Testament which gives us a comment on these verses on page 1211 in my Bible I think most of them are the same page 1211 Hebrews chapter 11 this is a commentary on Joseph and his bones I guess Hebrews 11 verse 22 by faith verse 22 Joseph Joseph at the end of his life made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones now his direction concerning his bones was an act of faith that means in other words he was trusting faith means to trust or to depend or to rely Joseph was trusting in the promises of God now why would he trust in the promises of God to want his bones buried in Israel why would you want your bones to be buried what difference does it make once you're dead have a look back up at verse 13 of the same chapter this is a commentary on all the patriarchs these all died in faith not having received the things promised but having seen them and greeted them from afar having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth for people who speak thus make it clear that they're seeking a homeland if they'd been thinking of that land from which they'd gone out they would have had opportunity to return but as it is they desire a better country that is a heavenly one therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for he has prepared for them a city see all the patriarchs really in wanting to be buried back in the land it wasn't really about the land of Israel it never really was about the land of Israel they were looking forward to a heavenly land they like us were looking forward to the new creation they were looking forward to a time when God will make the world right when all suffering will end when all death will end and that's really why Joseph was living in faith that's why Jacob was living in faith in Egypt they wanted their bones to be buried there because they recognised

Egypt they even recognised Canaan wasn't really where they're from they're from the heavenly country the country that we're all waiting for that we will all see them in one day now let me ask you just briefly how is your hope in the new creation would you say of yourself would you say of your hopes for your future of where you'd like to be of what you want for yourself in 10 years time in 20 years time in 50 years time what is your hope for the future is your hope for the future that one day we will live in God's perfect country in God's perfect land with everything right or is your hope for the future something to do with work or career or exams or family or relationships what is your hope for the future I want to encourage you to be like Joseph to be like Jacob those are good things don't worry you can hope for things in your life that's a good thing but don't make them ultimate our real hope the place that we really belong is in the new creation with God that's what we're really living for and if that is our true hope well that shapes the whole of our lives because actually when our earthly hopes fade and they do it's okay because we have a greater hope that we're living for what is your hope for the future is it God well that's the first point that we wanted to think about the first thing

I wanted to think about the second one is this and this is the second theme of these great chapters at the end God chooses those who he chooses and this brings us to the thorny issue of election which I'd like to finish with which I think is one of the great topics of the Bible but people get very itchy about this topic now we read in this wonderful chapter in chapter 49 some really weird stuff didn't we all this stuff about Reuben and Simeon and Levi and Judah and serpents and lions and all sorts of strange things that were going on what's going on here is that Jacob is blessing his sons and when Jacob's blessing his sons what he's doing is giving a prophetic utterance if you like this is God's word to his sons detailing their future when they live in Egypt and beyond and actually in the previous chapter in chapter 48 he blesses Ephraim and Manasseh who are the sons of Joseph in the same way he pronounces prophetically what their futures will be like these are like the promises of God to the tribes of Israel this is their future and what's surprising about it is that actually they all get different blessings did you notice

Reuben well you defiled my couch so you don't get very much you don't get pre-eminence Simeon and Levi well you don't either well and you get some of them like Zebulun in verse 13 he gets to live by the sea Issachar well he's a donkey some of them don't get great things but some of them do get some good things the one who gets the greatest is Judah verse 8 Judah your brothers shall praise you your father's son shall bow down to you verse 10 the scepter shall not depart from Judah nor the ruler start from beneath his feet in other words Judah will be the one that all the other tribes look to he will be the king tribe if you like from Judah comes the kings David Solomon etc and from Judah comes the lord Jesus the king of kings and lord of lords so it's interesting when God blesses the sons of Israel some get more blessing than others but that doesn't seem fair does it why do some get more than others and the reason for that is because blessing is all about grace it's not about fair it's not what you deserve it's about what is given to you according to promises according to grace and this is one of the great themes of the book of Genesis throughout the whole book of Genesis

[25 : 59] God has been a God who chose some people but not others when generation after generation sinned he picked one man Abraham and he said I'm going to give you a promise I'm going to bless you was it because Abraham was any better than anyone else no does that seem fair when Abraham had two sons Ishmael and Isaac Ishmael was the oldest but God gave his promises to Isaac Isaac was the one who got the blessings is that fair Isaac himself had two sons Jacob and Esau they were twins I mean you couldn't put a piece of paper between them they were born exactly the same time pretty much in fact Esau was the oldest and yet God said of Jacob I will bless you he gave his promises to Jacob not to Esau is that fair does that seem fair and we ask that question ourselves today why is it that God who is powerful and good blesses and saves some like us but not others like my dad or my brother is that fair does that seem fair and the answer is simply this it has to be unfair it cannot be in any other way apart from being unfair it must be unfair for it is only given by promise by grace and by definition grace is unfair it has to be unfair otherwise it's something that's deserved let me give you an illustration two scenarios imagine two guys

Tarquin and Crispin and they both work for the same company and there's a managing director and the managing director says at the end of the year if you hit your targets then I'll give you your bonus at the end of the year so Tarquin gets his head down works really hard bangs through his target and Crispin is a bit of a slacker he doesn't hit his target at the end of the year the ND gives Tarquin his bonus and Crispin not his bonus and that's fair now the thing is the ND's promise at the beginning of the year wasn't strictly a promise it was a contract it was a deal it was a two way thing if you achieve X then I will give you X so it was fair it was wages it was justice it was a fair and right thing now imagine scenario two the MD same company same two guys and he gives the same promise actually if you hit your targets then you get a bonus but year after year after year after year none of them hit their targets they just can't reach their targets so one year the ND says to Crispin Crispin I tell you what at the end of this year I'm going to give you a bonus no strings attached just like that I'm just going to give you a bonus and at the end of that year Tarquin has worked he's worked so hard but again he's just short of the target and Crispin not really worked that hard at all actually and he's a long way short of his target and the MD gives Crispin the bonus and Tarquin goes what are you doing that's not fair I've worked much harder than him I've done much better than him and the MD says yeah but what was the deal the deal was if you hit your target you get a bonus have you hit your target no you haven't so it's completely fair however with Crispin the reason he's received his bonus is because there was no strings attached because it was completely unfair it was just a promise it was just a gift and that's why he's received his bonus and the same is true for us when we say God that's not fair what we've missed is the point is that it cannot be fair it can only be given by grace according to mercy let me show you oh no it hasn't come up I'll have to explain what was in that table sorry we had some formatting issues earlier if it's by a contract a two way agreement therefore it's wages it's what you deserve it's justice it's fair now the deal is if you live a perfect life you will live in heaven forever but none of us do all of us come short of the target however God in his kindness completely unreasonably has given a promise through the Lord Jesus there are no conditions you don't have to do anything to have salvation in the Lord Jesus it's given as a gift it's given according to grace it's given by mercy not by justice and so by definition it is not fair the truth is it's not fair that God chooses anybody because nobody has reached the target just like Abraham just like Isaac just like Jacob

God chose them because he chose them out of mercy unfairly and so he's done for us the gospel of Jesus is given by a promise not by a contract it's given by mercy not by justice it's not fair and it has to be not fair now I don't know how you respond to this please do ask me questions afterwards my instinct is to go yeah but that's not fair that's what I'm saying and God has to keep saying to me but that's the point it can never be fair is it fair Mark Fosse that I have made my son die for you no it isn't Lord it cannot be fair how should we respond to this idea of God choosing and that's what he's been doing for the whole of Genesis and that's what he's been doing individually between the different sons and that's what he's been doing that's the whole through the whole of the Bible the right response and the biblical response is thanksgiving it's to thank God for his election for his choosing for his grace the reason that instinctively we find it hard to give thanks is because we think it's not fair but if we've understood that actually what God has done for us is unfairly by grace according to a promise unfairly given us salvation in the Lord Jesus and given us many many blessings besides that then we understand that the right response is thanksgiving and that's not fair and to emphasise this

[32 : 25] I want to just show you to finish the verse that actually Helen had the eagles say earlier which sums up the whole story of the whole of Genesis and the whole of Joseph's story in chapter 50 verse 20 we could do this as a memory verse but because of time I think we won't chapter 50 verse 20 the brothers Jacob's just died the brothers are fearful that Joseph will have reprisals against them for selling him into slavery when he was a boy and Joseph says don't worry boys don't worry brothers verse 20 well he's verse 19 do not fear am I in the place of God as for you you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring about that many people should be kept alive as they are today when people do sin when we sin when people sin against us they mean evil but God always means good it's worth saying that again isn't it when you mean evil when you sin when someone sins against you we mean evil but God means good

I want to finish with one verse from the New Testament which sums this up which is the promise of God there's the verse in verse 20 it's this verse of Romans 8 let me read this to you this is a promise of God that's worth holding on to we know that for those who love God all things work together for good for those who are called according to his purpose for those who are called according to his purpose that's Christians God works all things for good everything all things that happen in your life good or bad God is working for good that's another way of saying if others mean evil against you if you mean evil God will always mean good for your life and you know one day he will take us home he will take us to the new creation to live in glory with the Lord Jesus for the rest of forever however much we sin however much others sin against us because God has chosen us according to his grace by promise unfairly he's working all things for our good and that is one of the greatest promises of God for us why don't we praise him in prayer let's pray

Lord Jesus we want to thank you for your death for us by promise we want to thank you for your salvation for us by grace and for your precious precious precious promises that you are working all things for our good and will bring us home we pray Father God in the light of that future promise that we are clinging onto by hope that you'd help us to live in this land in Dulwich in London and to the day of our death hoping in your promise not letting go of that hope not letting other hopes crowd out our hopes in your promises not loving other idols or other things but fully trusting in you planting our feet one by one forward rushing for that great day when you make all things right when you bring us home and we pray this with great joy and thanksgiving in our hearts
Amen Amen Amen