

## 55. But God

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The true story of Joseph is a great example of a happy ending – from a despaired situation caused by his hated and jealous brothers to the pinnacle of the Egyptian government. When he had chances to get even with his brothers, Joseph extended God's grace and forgiveness to them. The only real reason why the whole story turned into a happy ending was because of God's intervention through His foreknowledge and providential will.

In this study, we will visit Joseph and his family for the last time. Jacob was with Joseph the first 17 years of his son's life. And by God's grace, Joseph was able to have the last 17 years of happiness, rediscovery, and restoration with his father.

### A. JACOB'S DEATH AND BURIAL

*Genesis 49:29-33* Then he charged 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, 30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. 32 The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth." 33 And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

*Genesis 50:1-3* Then Joseph fell on his father's face, and wept over him, and kissed him. 2 And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Forty days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. 4 And when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, 5 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me." Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.' " 6 And Pharaoh said, "Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear." 7 So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father's house. Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen. 9 And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering. 10 Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed seven days of mourning for his father. 11 And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, "This is a deep mourning of the Egyptians." Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan. 12 So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. 13 For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place. 14 And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.

It has been said that there are three basic attitudes towards death:

**1) Death-accepting attitude** – This view brings a concept of “Live like a dog and die like a pig because there is no tomorrow.” Such a destructive way to live.

**2) Death-denying attitude** – Many people try to dodge death and the aging process in any way possible. That is why some people would go extreme distances to make themselves look young and healthy. Yet, nobody has beaten the odds of death – one to one. You might be able to dodge taxes, not death.

**3) Death-defying attitude** – This is a biblical approach through Jesus Christ. Those who receive Jesus as the Savior and Lord will overcome death and have everlasting life in heaven. Though born-again believers may die physically, our spirit will live forever in Christ. That’s the way to live truly.

We know that the Egyptians were quite expert at this embalming process. We all have seen the images of the teenage king Tutankhamen of Egypt. They had a method of preserving bodies that still baffles the 21st century scientists.

Despite the prominence of Joseph in the government of Egypt, the family would never consider its inheritance to be in Egypt. The legitimacy of their claim to Canaan lay with God’s gift of the land to Abraham, the first forefather of Israel. The return of the funeral procession from Egypt for Jacob’s burial there renewed the family’s claim to the cave and the land. It was a pledge that they would one day return to occupy.

## **B. COMFORTING THE FEARFUL**

*Genesis 50:15-21* When Joseph’s brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, “Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him.” 16 So they sent messengers to Joseph, saying, “Before your father died he commanded, saying, 17 ‘Thus you shall say to Joseph: “I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.”’ Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father.” And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. 18 Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, “Behold, we are your servants.” 19 Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? 20 But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. 21 Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

In the wake of their father’s death, Joseph’s brothers feel something more than loss. They begin to feel the prickling stings of fear. After 17 years, they still aren’t sure of the genuineness of Joseph’s love for them and they dread his wrath.

Joseph first wants them to understand that he was not in the place of God. It wasn’t his job to bring retribution upon his brothers. From a human perspective, Joseph had every right and ability to bring retaliation upon his brothers, but he knew God was God, and he was not.

It is unfortunate that Joseph’s brothers did not believe his words when he told them years before that he had forgiven them. In fact, their unbelief and fear caused him to weep.

This illustrates immature Christians today who cannot accept God’s forgiveness from His Word, and, as a consequence, they live in fear and doubt. “Fear not!” is

Christ's Word to us just as it was Joseph's word to his brothers. In many people's ignorance, they wanted to earn God's forgiveness, but He already gave them full pardon of grace freely through Jesus's atoning sacrifice.

Joseph did not minimize the wrong his brothers did. He plainly declared, "*you meant evil against me.*" Although this was true, it was not the greatest truth. The greatest truth was "*BUT GOD meant it for good.*"

If every Christian takes his eyes off his immediate situation, he should be able to see the overarching and overruling hand of God in his life, to know that no matter what evil man brings against him, God can use it for good.

The root meaning of providence is "foresight... to see in advance" or "to provide for." But those definitions could leave us with too shallow an understanding. Providence contains far more than a passive reference to God's foreknowledge.

Back in the 17th century, the Westminster theologians hammered out a much more thorough statement: "God, the great Creator of all things, do uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures, actions, and things from the greatest event to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will, to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, goodness, and mercy."

God's redemptive providence is always at work, even through the most demonic schemes and actions. Classic illustration? The betrayal of Jesus Christ by Judas. Strange as it may seem, Judas's worst act of wickedness helped to bring about the best thing that ever happened: the Atonement.

"Am I in God's place?" Joseph asked them. Had he been a lesser man, he could have played "king of the mountain" and filled the role of God. "Grace killers" do that sort of thing. They exploit the power they have over others. They play a cruel and unfair game when they have someone cornered, someone who is vulnerable and at their mercy.

Joseph refused to do that. He didn't do it earlier at their reunion, and he doesn't do it now. In his obedience to God, he was restrained by feelings of tender mercy as he communicated God's grace. "Am I in God's place?" he asked his brothers, saying, in effect, "Brothers, listen to me. Let's get this cleared up for the last time. I know what you did, and I know what you meant by it. I know you meant to do me evil. Okay? I understand all that. That was your plan. But God had other plans, and He turned the results of your evil intentions into something good. Get this straight – God meant it all for good." Joseph never stood taller than at this moment in his life. As Churchill would say, it was his "finest hour."

Guard your heart when you have the power to place guilt on someone else. Refuse to rub their nose in the mess they've made. Remember the father of the Prodigal Son. Best of all, remember Joseph. "Don't be afraid," he comforted them kindly. "I will provide for you and your children."

Joseph was led by grace. He spoke by grace. He forgave by grace. He forgot by grace. He loved by grace. He remembered by grace. He provided by grace. Because of grace, when his brothers bowed before him in fear, he could say, "Get on your feet! God meant it all for good."

## C. JOSEPH AND JESUS IN TYPOLOGY

Before we finish this grand Book of Genesis, I want to call to your attention the comparison of Joseph to the Lord Jesus in typology:

1) The birth of Joseph was miraculous in that it was by the intervention of God as an answer to prayer.

The Lord Jesus was virgin born. His birth was certainly miraculous.

2) Joseph was loved by his father.

The Lord Jesus was loved by His Father, who declared, "This is My beloved Son."

3) Joseph had the coat of many colors which set him apart.

The Lord Jesus was set apart in that He was "separate from sinners."

4) Joseph announced that he was to rule over his brothers.

The Lord Jesus presented Himself as the Messiah.

5) Joseph was hated by his brothers without a cause.

The Lord Jesus was hated by His people without a cause.

6) Joseph was sold for pieces of silver by his brothers.

The Lord Jesus was sold for pieces of silver by His own disciple Judas.

7) Joseph was tempted severely but did not sin.

The Lord Jesus was tempted for 40 days and 40 nights, but He did not sin.

8) Joseph associated with two criminals in the jail – One was pardoned (the butler), but the other was not (the baker).

The Lord Jesus associated with two criminals on the cross – One trusted Him as the King and Jesus promised him that he would be with Him in paradise on that day, but the other ridiculed Jesus and I am sure that you all know where he is now.

## D. JOSEPH'S DEATH

*Genesis 50:22-26 So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived one hundred and ten years. 23 Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the third generation. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees. 24 And Joseph said to his brethren, "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." 25 Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." 26 So Joseph died, being one hundred and ten years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.*

According to this passage and Hebrews 11:22, Joseph was never buried. His coffin laid aboveground for the 400 or so years until it was taken back to Canaan. It was a silent witness for all those years that Israel was going back to the Promised Land, just as God said.

*Hebrews 11:22 By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones.*

This promise was fulfilled some 400 years later when Israel left Egypt in Exodus 13:19. This command showed that Joseph's heart was in the Promised Land. It also proved him to be a man of great faith, trusting in things not yet seen.

Genesis begins with the perfect garden that was made by God and ends with a coffin that represents the death of the human. What a commentary on the results of sin in this world! But the Bible ends with a description of a beautiful "garden city" in Revelation 21 and 22, the home of all who put their trust in Jesus Christ.

## **E. APPLICATIONS**

1) Nothing touches us that has not first passed through His hands of approval.

2) This brings a choice of actions to us:

We can choose to run toward our God and depend on Him to deliver us in His due time and learn from Him through the trial. Or we can start to throw temper tantrums and stay in the trial longer until God sees that we have learned. Guess who gets to make that choice?