

"GOD WILL SURELY VISIT YOU"

I. Introduction

- A. At various points in this sermon series through Genesis, we have noted that the phrase "These are the generations of" occurs ten times in these fifty chapters.
- B. This phrase serves as an important structural marker.
- C. It tells us that Genesis records the historical outworking of God's plan of redemption from generation to generation.
- D. Here at the end of the book, we can see clear signs that this plan is progressing.
- E. The covenant family has grown to a sizable number of people.
- F. They have been made an instrument of blessing to the nations.
- G. And in the book's final chapter, they finally begin to live at peace with each other.
- H. Nevertheless, there is still one factor that makes it clear that God's people are still waiting for the fulfillment of the covenant promises.
- I. Genesis ends with Jacob and Joseph dying in Egypt before they are able to receive the inheritance that God had promised them in Canaan.
- J. As we study this text today, we will see how it assures us that, even though we, like Jacob and Joseph, live in the valley of the shadow of death, our God will surely visit us and bring to completion the work of grace that he has begun in our lives.

II. A Rehearsal of Our Homecoming

- A. Our passage picks up right after Jacob's pronouncement of blessing upon his twelve sons.
1. As Jacob realizes that his time on this earth is coming to a close, he gives his final instructions to his sons.
 2. As he does so, he reiterates that he wants to be buried back in the land of Canaan, in the tomb of his ancestors.
 3. Jacob believes that the future of the covenant people is in Canaan, not in Egypt.
 4. This belief is based upon what God told him back in chapter 46, saying, "I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again." (v. 4)
 5. Jacob took that promise so seriously that he wanted to make sure that his body was not left in Egypt.
 6. The instructions that he gave concerning his burial demonstrated his faith in God's promise.
- B. This is an excellent example of how the death and burial of a believer is an opportunity to bear witness to our future hope.
1. What happened to Jacob is something that will happen to every Christian, with the exception of those who are still alive on the day when Christ returns.
 2. The rest of us will die in a land that is not our own.
 3. We will die while we are still waiting to enter into the inheritance that the Lord has promised us.

4. But we will not die without hope.
 5. Jacob did not see his death as an insurmountable obstacle to the fulfillment of God's promises.
 6. Neither should we see our death as such an obstacle.
 7. In fact, death is a necessary step in bringing us to the point where we will be able to enter into our eternal rest.
 8. As the apostle Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15, "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable." (v. 50)
 9. We have to be given new bodies, bodies that are imperishable and immortal, in order to inherit God's kingdom.
 10. And this is exactly what will happen to us on the day of Christ's return.
- C. When Jacob gave the instructions for his burial, he was confessing his belief that the Lord would not abandon him to the grave.
1. Though his faith was based upon less information than we have available to us today, he believed that he would be raised up, along with his forebears, and brought into the inheritance that God had promised them.
 2. Our passage hints at this resurrection hope when it describes Jacob's death euphemistically, saying that when he breathed his last he "was gathered to his people."
 3. This indicates that when Jacob's soul was separated from his body at death, his soul was reunited with the souls of his fathers.

4. Theologians refer to this as the *intermediate state* of a believer after death.
 5. This teaching says that, at our death, the souls of believers are glorified in Christ and enjoy a preliminary experience of resurrection life.
 6. In that state, we await the day when our bodies will be called forth from our graves clothed with immortality, to be reunited with our already perfected souls.
- D. In the first half of Genesis 50, we are told how Joseph and his brothers carried out their father's request.
1. Joseph had Jacob's body embalmed so that the corpse could be preserved for the journey to Canaan.
 2. Embalming was a common practice among the ancient Egyptians.
 3. Some of their mummified corpses have been preserved even to this day.
 4. Embalming was normally done by Egyptian priests, because there were particular religious beliefs associated with the practice.
 5. It is noteworthy that Joseph had physicians, rather than priests, do the embalming of his father.
 6. He had to have Jacob embalmed so that his body could be taken to Canaan, but he made sure that it was done in a way that maintained the religious distinctiveness of the covenant people.
 7. He did not want Jacob to be embalmed in connection with pagan superstitions, so he entrusted this work to physicians instead of priests.

- E. After obtaining permission from Pharaoh to leave Egypt, Joseph led his brothers to Canaan to bury Jacob.
1. This was what Tolkien would call a “There and Back Again” journey, as the covenant family would return to Egypt after Jacob’s burial.
 2. But this trip did point forward to another journey that would be made by their descendants, a journey from which they would not return — the exodus from Egypt.
 3. This is evident in the fact that the Hebrew verb that is often translated as “go up” is used seven times in chapter 50.
 4. This is the same verb that is used at various points in the book of Exodus to describe Israel’s deliverance from Egypt.
 5. Another detail in our text that may point to the exodus is the phrase “beyond the Jordan.”
 6. While scholars debate this, a good case can be made for taking this to mean the region of the Transjordan, on the eastern shore of the Jordan river.
 7. If this is correct, then Joseph and his brothers entered into Canaan near the place where the Israelites would enter it under Joshua.
 8. This would mean the route they took was roughly the same as that taken by the exodus generation when they left Egypt.
 9. This was not the most logical route, as it would have been more direct to travel along the Mediterranean coast.
 10. These parallels with the exodus suggests that, in God’s providence, Jacob’s burial was an enacted prophecy of the exodus.

11. We might say that it served as a rehearsal for Israel's exodus from Egypt.
12. The bringing of Jacob's body out of Egypt to the Promised Land pointed forward to the day when God would bring all the covenant people into their inheritance.
13. A parallel to this is seen whenever we lay a deceased Christian to rest.
14. As we take comfort in knowing that the soul of that believer is now with the Lord in glory, we also attest that the body of that believer, along with the bodies of all the dead in Christ, will one day be raised in glory to enjoy eternity in the new Jerusalem.

III. An Assurance of Our Preservation

- A. One thing that is especially significant in the first part of this passage is the fact that Joseph and his brothers acted in a unified way as they carried out their father's request.
 1. This is explicitly stated in verse 12, where it says, "Thus his sons did for him as he had commanded them."
 2. All the sons of Jacob did this, not just Joseph.
 3. The covenant family is finally whole.
 4. Though there have been many conflicts between the sons of Jacob up to this point, the book of Genesis ends with them living at peace with each other.
 5. This is a picture of how the Lord graciously restrains his people from biting, devouring, and consuming each other.

6. In giving us this picture, God assures us that he is intent on preserving his church.
- B. This theme is further emphasized by what takes place when Joseph and his brothers return back to Egypt after burying their father.
1. It had been seventeen years since Jacob and his sons arrived in Egypt.
 2. Now that Jacob is gone, Joseph's brothers are worried that he might seek revenge against them for selling him into slavery.
 3. It would seem that their consciences were still tormenting them after all those years.
 4. This may suggest that, though Joseph had forgiven them long ago, they had never really confessed their sin to him and sought reconciliation with him.
 5. They may have let things remain unspoken for the seventeen years they lived in Egypt.
 6. As long as their father was still alive, they were not worried about Joseph.
 7. They knew that he would never do anything to harm them as long as Jacob was there.
 8. But now that Jacob was gone, what would Joseph do?
 9. Had he truly forgiven them?
 10. The brothers' uneasiness about this reminds us why it is so important for us to be direct in seeking reconciliation with those whom we have wronged.

- C. Joseph's comforting response to his brothers' concerns gives us a wonderful picture of how a godly person ought to respond to injustice.
1. First, Joseph begins with the rhetorical question, "am I in the place of God?"
 2. In saying this, Joseph shows that the righting of wrongs is something that is to be left in the hands of God.
 3. Second, Joseph tells his brothers, "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."
 4. This encourages us to look for God's providence in all things, even in human malice.
 5. Third, Joseph says, "do not fear; for I will provide for you and your little ones."
 6. This reminds us that we are to repay evil with forgiveness and kindness.
- D. The words "you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good" summarize the key theme of the Joseph story.
1. As Joseph looked back on all that had happened to him, he was able to see the Lord's providential hand guiding everything that took place.
 2. He saw God's hand in both the good things that happened to him and the bad things that happened to him.
 3. He believed that God was superintending over all of it to do him, and many others, good.
 4. This is a perspective that every believer needs to embrace.

5. Doing so enables us to endure whatever comes our way, because we are confident that the events of our lives are always being directed by the hand of our God, who is all-powerful, most wise, and most good.
- E. The last paragraph in Genesis describes the death of Joseph.
1. This paragraph calls our attention to the great blessings that the Lord bestowed upon Joseph in this life.
 2. Joseph lived to be 110 years old.
 3. While this was not as old as Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham, it was considered by the Egyptians to be the ideal age.
 4. Joseph also lived to see his great-grandchildren, a blessing that is not experienced by many.
- F. As great as these blessings were, Joseph still died as his father died, trusting that even greater blessings lay ahead for him and his people.
1. From his deathbed he told the covenant people that God would surely visit them.
 2. The Hebrew word translated as “visit” is used in the Old Testament to refer to a divine intervention that changes destinies.
 3. Sometimes, God visits in judgment.
 4. We see an example of this in Isaiah 23:17, where it says, “At the end of seventy years, the LORD will visit Tyre, and she will return to her wages and will prostitute herself with all the kingdoms of the world on the face of the earth.”
 5. Other times, God visits in salvation.

6. We see this in Jeremiah 27:22, where it says, "They shall be carried to Babylon and remain there until the day when I visit them, declares the LORD. Then I will bring them back and restore them to this place."
 7. Here in Genesis 50, Joseph is telling God's people that they will not remain sojourners in a foreign land forever.
 8. They will be brought into their own land, the land that God promised to give them.
- G. God did visit the people of Israel, though they had to wait four hundred years before he did so.
1. But that visitation was merely a foretaste of a much greater visitation.
 2. John the Baptist's father Zechariah sang of the advent of the ultimate visitation when he declared, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people." (Luke 1:68)
 3. We are still waiting for the consummation of that visitation of which Zechariah sang.
 4. We are waiting for that great day when "the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of the archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord." (1 Thess. 4:16-17)
 5. That is what Jacob and Joseph were ultimately waiting for, and it is what every Christian continues to wait for.

6. We are waiting for the visitation that will bring us into Immanuel's land.

IV. Conclusion

- A. In his second letter to Timothy, the apostle Paul declares that when Christ came into the world, he "abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2 Tim. 1:10)
- B. We know that this is true because Christ rose victorious from the grave.
- C. Nevertheless, we still experience death, along with all the miseries connected with life in this fallen world.
- D. This reminds us that Christ's destruction of death, and of all his other enemies, will not be brought to its full effect until his return at the end of the age.
- E. Until that day dawns, we need to trust in God's sovereign control over all that transpires in our lives and in this world.
- F. As we do so, we will find that death loses its power over us, and that all the cares, frustrations, and injustices of this life are mysteriously working together towards the accomplishment of God's good purpose for us and for all of his people.