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Sarita Gallagher

George Fox University, sgallagher@georgefox.edu

Steven C. Hawthorne

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Blessing as Transformation

Sarita D. Gallagher and Steven C. Hawthorne



Sarita D. Gallagher is an Adjunct Professor in Global Studies at Azusa Pacific

University. She has served in both Australia and Papua New Guinea teaching Theology and Intercultural Studies in local universities and Bible Schools. Her focus is on the missiological significance of the Abrahamic blessing in Scripture.



Steven C. Hawthorne is Director of WayMakers, a mission and prayer

mobilization ministry. After co-editing the *Perspectives* course and book in 1981, he launched "Joshua Project," a series of research expeditions among unreached peoples in Asia and the Middle East. He also co-authored *Prayerwalking: Praying on Site with Insight* with Graham Kendrick.

God's promise to Abraham was effectively a promise to the world. In Genesis 12:1-2, God declared that He would not only bless Abram (his name at that time), but that Abram would become a blessing. The next verse reveals the amazing magnitude of that blessing: "In you all the families of the earth will be blessed." How was it possible that one man would become a blessing to all of the families throughout the earth?

Even though Abram obeyed God, it's unlikely that he grasped the global implications right away. The complete promise, as Abraham heard it repeated in the years to come, had three parts: land, family and blessing. The first two parts about land and family probably made some sense right away. But what probably remained a mystery was the promise that somehow through his family, blessing would come upon every nation on earth.

While years passed without receiving the promised land or sons, Abraham must have pondered just what the fulfillment of God's promise would look like. We would do well to ponder it as well. The promise that "all nations will be blessed" is still being fulfilled in our day. What does it mean for a nation or people to be blessed? What should we be looking for as stewards of Abraham's promised blessing by faith in Christ?

What Does "Blessing" Mean?

If our only source were the book of Genesis, we would learn a great deal about the idea of blessing. In Genesis, the word "blessing" is used in two distinct ways. First, we see the term blessing used to describe a pronouncement or endowment of blessing. It is an act in which a future destiny or goodness is spoken, and thus bestowed upon the person or entity being blessed. Second, the term blessing is used to describe the fulfillment of what was promised, whether material or otherwise. The word blessing, then, refers both to the giving of blessing as well as to the gifts that blessing brings forth.

Blessing as Endowment

God pronounced blessing as early as the fifth day of creation. After He created the first animal life, He declared the creatures of the sea and birds of the air as "good." Immediately He went on to bless them, empowering them to fulfill the mandate he gave them, to "be fruitful and multiply and fill" their respective domains. By blessing them, God had made them more

than merely good. His blessing endowed them with a fruitfulness and a fullness that would surely unfold. On the sixth day of creation, God created animals and humans. Once again all that God created on that day was declared to be "good." He then blessed humanity, endowing man with the mandate and enablement to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth." Throughout the rest of Scripture the idea of blessing remains linked to the idea of life flourishing toward an intended fullness. When blessing is fulfilled in creatures, people, households or nations, they are enabled to move toward their intended destiny. That change may be slow or rapid. Blessing is never seen as magical, but rather a dynamic of God's life. Blessing is God's goodness made "gooder."

Further on in the record of Genesis, we see more occasions in which words of blessing are pronounced. Jacob's struggle with Esau to obtain his father's pronouncement of blessing is the most prominent instance (Gen 27). His struggle with an angel (or with God?) to obtain a pronouncement of blessing is noteworthy: "I will not let go unless you bless me." (32:26-29). In every case, this verbal giving of blessing was understood as far more than words, but as an irrevocable transfer of God's special enablement and abundance.

Blessing as Fulfillment

In Genesis we also see clear references to how the promise of blessing was fulfilled in tangible ways. Near the close of Abraham's life we read that God "had blessed Abraham in every way" (24:1). What exactly were these diverse ways that Abraham had been blessed?

We can find three broad categories of blessing in the Genesis story. First, we see blessing as material wealth and fruitfulness. Second, we see blessing as favored relationship with God and the experience of His presence. And third, we see blessing bringing about a measure of peace amidst families and peoples.

1. Material Wealth and Fruitfulness

Abraham's servant lists the ways God had blessed Abraham: "The LORD has greatly blessed my master, so that he has become rich; and He has given him flocks and herds, and silver and gold, and servants and maids, and camels and donkeys" (24:35). Note the

expression, "The LORD has...blessed...so that..." It was obvious to this servant that the material wealth was the result of God's blessing.

God also blessed Isaac in material ways. "After the death of Abraham...God blessed his son Isaac" (25:11). The account describes the quintessential act of blessing: turning barrenness to fruitfulness. "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived" (25:21). Isaac's blessing abounded in material wealth: "Isaac sowed in that land and reaped in the same year a hundredfold. And the LORD blessed him, and the man became rich, and continued to grow richer until he became very wealthy; for he had possessions of flocks and herds and a great household" (26:12-14). God gave Isaac a plentiful water supply which to him meant that "we will be fruitful in the land." The onlooking Philistines surmised that the supply of water was evidence that Isaac was "blessed of the Lord" (26:15-22).

The same kind of material abundance was described as blessing in the life of Abraham's grandson, Jacob. After he had labored in Laban's extended household, Laban said to Jacob that his financial and material success was directly connected to Jacob, "The LORD has blessed me because of you" (30:27). Jacob agreed, telling Laban that God has "blessed you wherever I turned" (30:30).

It's important to note that in many parts of the world blessing is commonly thought of as a magical force or a mystical power by which someone can obtain desired benefits. In this mentality, blessing is not much more than luck or fortune that can sometimes be manipulated with procedures or by people believed to have special powers. Advocates of the so-called "prosperity gospel" may have more in common with this worldview which reduces blessing to a method of obtaining wealth from God.

2. More than Material Wealth: God's Presence

Blessing was more than abounding fruitfulness and riches. Neighboring nations recognized some intangible aspects of blessing. Most notable was God's presence with Abraham. His neighbors said to him, "God is with you in all that you do" (21:22). With people of the city of Sodom looking on, no less a figure than

Melchizedek publicly celebrated Abram's favor with God, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High...who has delivered your enemies into your hand" (14:19-20). Similarly, Isaac's neighbors said, "We see plainly that the Lord has been with you" (26:22).

3. More than Covenant with God: Peace Amidst the Peoples

Recognizing the extraordinary presence of God with Abraham, his Philistine neighbors approached him in order to work out a covenant of peace (21:22-23). This brought peace to a dispute about water usage and the outcome that "Abraham sojourned in the land of the Philistines for many days" enjoying prolonged good will (21:24-34). Years later in Isaac's time, the relationship with the Philistines became strained again. The Philistines attempted to push Isaac's household out of their territory (26:12-17). God helped Isaac discover sources of water again and again. Eventually there was such an abundance of water for everyone that the Philistines approached Isaac to "make a covenant" of peace with him. The Philistines finally declared to Isaac, "You are now the blessed of the Lord" (26:18-29).

Blessing Beyond Abraham's Family

We've seen what it meant for Abraham and his family to be blessed. But do we also see the nations blessed in the stories of Abraham's family in Genesis?

Less than Blessed

Abraham and his household sojourned twice to live in foreign nations, and twice he lied about his wife (in Genesis 12 and again in chapter 20). Each time, Sarai (her name at the time) was taken to be the wife of the king, which brought judgment to the host nation. In the second instance, when the king realized that God's wrath was about to fall upon his entire people, he confronted Abraham saying, "How have I sinned against you, that you have brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? You have done to me things that ought not to be done" (20:9). Even though Abraham prayed for the king's household so that God restored the capacity to bear children, it's hard to consider the entire event as an act of blessing to another nation.

Spilling Over to Neighbors and Nations

Despite these and other events, God did bring help to other nations through Abraham and his descendants. For example, Abraham came to the rescue of the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 14), which had been taken captive by raiding armies that had seized "all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah and all their food supply" (14:11). Not long after this, Abraham prayed that God would spare the entire city of Sodom (no doubt including some who he had already rescued from captivity). He argued his case before God, not just for Lot and his family, but for "the whole city" (19:28). Even though the city was destroyed, the point is that Abraham initiated intercession to save the entire city.

The previously mentioned water for the Philistines by Isaac's well-digging (26:12-22) and blessing on Laban's business through Jacob (30:27) are additional examples of blessing on surrounding nations and households.

It is significant that near the end of Genesis, we see Abraham's grandson Jacob pronouncing a blessing upon the Pharaoh himself. The exact words aren't recorded, but there was a formal occasion in which "Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (47:7,10).

The crescendo of Genesis is the story of Joseph. Like Abraham and Isaac before him, the incredible productivity of Joseph's work caused watching foreigners to conclude that God's presence with Joseph had brought a surprising abundance. "The LORD was with him and ... the LORD caused all that he did to prosper in his hand" (Gen 39:3). His master recognized that "the LORD'S blessing was upon all that he owned, in the house and in the field" (39:5) because of Joseph.

Blessing Egypt and the People of All the Earth

God gave Joseph an interpretation of a dream that predicted a seven-year famine. Pharaoh acknowledged Joseph's wisdom as coming from God and declared, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt" and further, "Without your permission, no one shall raise his hand or foot in all the land of Egypt" (41:41, 44). When the famine came, its devastation "spread over all the face of the earth" (41:56). Joseph was positioned to extend blessing to many nations, as "the people of all the earth came to buy grain from Joseph" (41:57).

In the second year of the seven-year famine, Joseph distributed food in exchange for money and livestock (47:14-17). As the final year of the famine came, he had arranged for the survival of the people of Egypt. In exchange for state ownership of land and a 20 percent tax (a very generous arrangement compared to most feudal systems), he offered grain to be used as seed for planting as a way of restarting agricultural cycles after the famine (47:18-24). As the famine ends with hope for long-term survival, the statement of the people is telling: "You have saved our lives!" (47:25).¹

Later Will Be Greater: Fulfillment in Descendents

Did Abraham comprehend the blessing to the nations that God was promising, especially the eventual magnitude of it? In each of the five times that God promised blessing to the nations, notice how God amplified and clarified how His promise would be fulfilled.

Three Times to Abraham

In the initial call and promise, God told Abram that he would become "a great nation." The promise was framed as if in one person "all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:3).

In the second announcement, the promise seems almost identical. In one great person, "all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (18:18). But the next verse adds that God would bring about "what had been spoken" to Abraham, referring to the promise, in connection with "the righteousness and justice" lived out by "his children and his household after him." From this point forward the promise would emphasize what would happen in Abraham's descendents.

In the drama of the third announcement in Genesis 22 we find a significant shift. Abraham obeyed God by offering his son Isaac. God provided a substitute sacrifice and immediately repeated the promise, but with a significant difference. No longer is the promise of blessing to be fulfilled during the lifetime of Abraham, but instead, in the days of his children yet to come. "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (22:18). The singular word "seed" is a generic term describing the generations of Abraham's future descendants. God promised this with the surprising gravity of solemnly swearing with an oath, "By Myself

I have sworn..." (22:16) The purpose of the oath was to assure future generations that God would not fail to fulfill His promise to bless all nations, and that He would do this amazing thing through them.

Again to Isaac and Yet Again to Jacob

God gave the promise a fourth time, this time directly to Isaac. Once again He said that "in your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (26:4). The word "seed" is amplified, spoken of as descendents as numerous as the stars in the sky (15:5, 22:17). In the fifth declaration, God promised Jacob that his descendents would be numerous and would "spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south" (28:14). At the time, Jacob may have thought that the geographic expansion was nothing more than populating the immediate land of promise. But it is possible that the vigorous geographic expansion is related to the eventual global fulfillment of the promise.

The Promise Fulfilled in Christ

Most Christians have been taught well about Jesus Christ coming to provide a way for people to be adopted as sons and daughters into the family of God. In the book of Galatians, Paul says that "when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son... that we might receive" adoption as children of God (Gal 4:4-5). But a few verses earlier in the same book Paul says that those who believe in Christ have been joined with Christ in such a way that they become part of Abraham's family. "If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29).

The way the promise was given to Abraham, blessing would be fulfilled in the "seed" of Abraham. This word is often used as a "collective singular," speaking of many seeds. Thus, the term can refer to one descendent or to a multitude of descendents. Which is it?

Paul answers the question this way: Both are true. There is one pre-eminent son of Abraham: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Christ" (Gal 3:29). Christ is the one seed of Abraham, but Paul also declares that since people become sons and daughters of Abraham's family by faith,

the promise is being fulfilled by their faith as those who inherit the promise:

"It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham" (Gal 3:7-9).

Christ has now ended the curse and opened the family of God. Now people from every family on earth can be part of Abraham's family by faith in Christ. They inherit the full family heritage of being blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations.

God's Promise Becomes Our Mandate

God's promise to bless the nations through Abraham's descendants carries mandate force for all who have been joined with Christ by faith. The promise so clearly reveals God's purpose, that Christians rightly consider it to convey God's mandate to serve as His agents

of blessing among all the peoples of the earth.² We are blessed in Christ in order to bring forth the blessing of Christ among all the nations. But what are we hoping for? What does it mean for the nations to be blessed? And how are we to pursue it? The promise of blessing shapes and integrates our mission in two important ways.

Relational Blessing: Belonging to God's Family

The greatest blessing imaginable is the privilege of belonging to God's people, and therefore, belonging to God as His children. Christ has opened Abraham's family to all. We are now seeing people from every people, tribe and clan being joined with Christ by faith and enfolded into the people of God. Extending the invitation to belong to God's family is the greater part of what it means to bring blessing to the nations. We cannot consider that the Abrahamic blessing has visited a people if the gospel of Jesus Christ has not yet been clearly conveyed to them.

The Story of Blessing: Prevailing Over Curse *Richard Bauckham*

In Genesis 12 Abraham is singled out by God immediately following the thoroughly universal narrative of the first eleven chapters of Genesis. The story brings us to the great catalogue of all the nations, 70 of them, descended from the three sons of Noah found in chapter 10. Then chapter 11 tells the story of Babel, from which the entire human race was scattered over all the earth to form the various nations, divided by language and geography. Genesis 10-11 sets, as it were, the international scene for the whole rest of the Bible's story. Unlike the choice of Noah and his family, the singling out of Abraham is not at all to be understood as God giving up on the nations. In Abraham's case, he is singled out precisely so that blessing may come to all the nations, to all the seventy nations God had scattered over the face of the whole earth.

Blessing is the key word in God's promises to Abraham: Abraham himself will be blessed, in that his descendants will be a great nation, and Abraham will be a blessing, in that all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:2-3). The promise that all the nations will be blessed is repeated four more times in Genesis (18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). On the last of these occasions it is given to Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob. Moreover, even within the stories of Jacob and his sons, the blessing of the nations begins—or at least is foreshadowed—when Jacob brings blessing to Laban (30:27) and Joseph to Potiphar (39:5). Then there is the peculiarly significant scene when the aged patriarch Jacob, on his arrival in Egypt, gives his blessing to no less than the Pharaoh of Egypt (47:7).

Blessing is a rich biblical notion

that has been rather neglected in our theology. Blessing in the Bible refers to God's characteristically generous and abundant giving of all good to his creatures and his continual renewal of the abundance of created life. Blessing is God's provision for human flourishing. But it is also relational: to be blessed by God is not only to know God's good gifts but to know God himself in his generous giving. Because blessing is relational, the movement of the blessing is a movement that goes out from God and returns to him. God's blessing of people overflows in their blessing of others, and, those who experience blessing from God in turn bless God, which means that they give all that creatures really can give to God: thanksgiving and praise.

Blessing highlights the relationship between creation and salvation in a different way from other ways

Richard Bauckham was Professor of New Testament Studies at the University of St. Andrews. He has published many works in historical theology and the New Testament. From *Bible and Mission*, 2003. Used by permission of Baker Academic Books, Grand Rapids, MI.

What will it look like when this aspect of God's blessing is fulfilled? We can look forward to the day when we will see at least some from every people on earth trusting and following Christ. The blessing of the nations means much more than evangelism, but it certainly can mean no less than the evangelization of every people.

We have seen in the book of Genesis that God displayed evidence of His dynamic presence with His people. God will be no less present amidst the peoples of the earth as groups of obedient followers of Christ emerge and grow among the nations. As in the book of Genesis, the presence of God with His people in our day is the beginning of all of the more tangible aspects of blessing that God brought about. This means that evangelization has a special priority. God's promise to bless the nations is the framework in which Christ's commission makes sense. This same promise authorizes Christ's followers to hope and to work for God's life to abound in every people.

Material and Social Blessing: Abundance and Peace

We can expect the blessing of belonging to God to become a reality amidst every people. But we can look forward to so much more! We can expect to see significant displays of the abundance of God's life. We should not expect a utopian perfection. But we can work and pray with a strong hope, partly informed by what we see in the book of Genesis, that God will be with His people to bring forth significant measures of blessing among the nations.

And so we ask again, what will the fulfillment of God's promise to bless the nations look like? Of course, it will be different in every place and people, but we should expect God to bring forth every kind of blessing, such as economies that flourish with justice and righteousness, agricultures and industries that abound with plenty for all, and peace throughout communities and between peoples and races. We can expect that God will enable His people to wage war with disease, to break the vicious cycles of poverty, to

of characterizing God's activity in the world. Already on the fifth day of the creation God blesses (Gen 1:22). Blessing is the way God enables his creation to be fertile and fruitful, to grow and to flourish. It is in the most comprehensive sense God's purpose for his creation. Wherever human life enjoys the good things of creation and produces the good fruits of human activity, God is pouring out his blessing. Wherever people bless God for his blessings, to that extent God is known as the good Creator who provides for human flourishing. God's blessing is universal.

But we should not think of the idea of blessing as something that describes God's goodness in creation, but does not also help us understand his goodness in salvation. Salvation, too, is God's blessing, since salvation is the fulfillment of God's purposes in spite of the damage evil does to God's creation. The Abrahamic blessing is more than the blessing of creation because it is designed to contend with and to

overcome its opposite: God's curse.

With sin God's curse enters creation alongside of God's blessing. We found the universal background to God's promise to Abraham in the account of the nations in Genesis 10-11. But there is an even earlier background in Genesis 3 and 4, where the blessings of creation turn to curse (3:17; 4:11). The curse even enters into God's promise to Abraham, apparently paralleling the blessing. God says to Abraham in Genesis 12: "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse" (Gen 12:3; cf. 27:29; Num 24:9). But blessing predominates in the promise (as the difference between the plural "those who bless you" and the singular "the one who curses you" seems to suggest), and it is clearly blessing, not curse that is the goal of God's calling of Abraham. Therefore blessing has the last word in the promise: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Through the story of Israel curse continually accompanies blessing

(e.g., Deut 7:12-16; 27-28), but the ultimate goal of God's promise to Abraham is the blessing that will prevail over the curse. It does when the seed of Abraham, the singled-out descendant of Abraham, the Messiah, becomes "a curse for us..." so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles" (Gal 3:13-14). This is why God's promise that the nations will be blessed is called "the gospel" by Paul (Gal 3:8). The secret of the promise is Christ's bearing of the curse so that the blessing may prevail. The gospel is that in Jesus Christ the curse has been set aside and God's creative purpose for the blessing of his creation is established beyond any possibility of reversal. God's last and effective word is his blessing. It is a particular word, spoken in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, broadcast by those who like Paul cannot but pass it on, so powerful is its effect, overflowing with blessing from those who, blessed by it, become a blessing to others.

provide water in desert lands, and to be present with healing in the midst of catastrophe.

We should expect that some of Abraham's children by faith will be used by God to preserve life after the example of Joseph. We are probably seeing now in many cities an answer to Abraham's prayer for the city of Sodom in Genesis 18. In that prayer God said that an entire city would be spared the immediate consequences of their sin because of the righteousness of a few. In Abraham's day there were less than ten. Now there are millions of his faith family spread throughout many of the cities of the earth.

Blessing as Transformation

Recently the term "transformation" has helped many express hope that Christian mission can be directed beyond successful evangelism to also seek lasting changes in society which reflect the justice and character of Christ. The biblical ground for integrating evangelism with social action is usually found in numerous biblical texts dealing with the hope and reality of the kingdom of God. It could be that we have been overlooking a body of biblical truth that supports a robust and strategic holism. God's ancient promise of blessing provides a vivid, rich and powerful framework for integrating the pursuit of societal transformation and the completion of world evangelization.

Here are six reasons why the Abrahamic promise of blessing provides a framework for us to pray, plan and co-labor for the evangelization of all the peoples of the earth with hope that there will be significant transformation.

1. God Works with and through His People

God's people work with intentionality, strategy and hope, using all of the grace, skills and resources God has entrusted to them. But at the same time, God infuses the work of His people with His power and life. Blessing is a function of the work of people and the presence of God. Blessing is always more than the sum of all human efforts.

2. Increase and Fullness, but Never Perfection or Utopia

A blessed city or people is not a perfect society. Instead, hope for blessing gives us courage to pray and to work toward societies that flourish in every way—spiritually,

relationally, physically, economically, aesthetically and environmentally.

3. Not Exclusive to God's People

While God's people are distinctively blessed, God intends that blessing extend beyond His people. The well-being of entire cities and nations can be pursued without respect to how the gospel may have been received or rejected.

4. Growth Rather than Redistribution

Generosity is certainly a virtue of anyone who would desire to be a blessing in a biblical sense. But being a blessing means something other than merely sharing wealth with equality in view. The basic idea of blessing is that God's life multiplies and comes to an abundance or fullness by God's doing.

5. Blessing Even From the Poor and Powerless

Throughout Genesis, God brought about great blessing through weak, comparatively poor or powerless people. Being a blessing in God's hand is never the exclusive privilege of those who are wealthy or well-positioned by global standards.

6. Blessing is Variable, Slow-Forming and Long-Lasting

Changes that can be attributed to God's blessing often take place over a period of years or even generations. The fruition of blessing appears in comparable, but never identical ways in every people or place.

Co-Workers with God to Bring Blessing

We find in the Genesis account a remarkably clear prophetic sketch of the broad scope of God's purpose for His people. Since God's promise to Abraham embodies His purpose and our mission, then we are right to expect that our mission will lead to social and material change or transformation. But the main lesson to be learned is not that God's mission includes concerns for social and physical issues. The greatest lessons we may find are those which show us how to co-work with God to bring forth His blessing. To be God's blessing among all the peoples will require our utmost effort somehow blended with the exertion of God's miraculous, life-giving power.

As God continues the fulfillment of His promise in our day, we can learn important lessons about how we can co-work with God from the lives of Abraham's family. Perhaps the person in Genesis that exemplifies the mystery of God at work with His people to bring forth blessing is Abraham's great-grandson Joseph.

1. Co-working With God

Joseph worked with God and God worked through Joseph. When Potiphar's household was blessed, the miraculous increase was said to be "the Lord's blessing." But the abundance multiplied in extraordinary ways because of the diligence and wisdom of Joseph's efforts. We see God at work in supernatural ways by giving Joseph abilities to interpret dreams. But it was Joseph's skill and wisdom, given by God, that put together a long range plan to help the people of Egypt survive the famine and to restore economic and agricultural abundance.

2. Working Faithfully Regardless of Position

When Joseph worked as a slave, he worked diligently so that blessing abounded throughout all of his master's affairs. Even while in Pharaoh's dungeon as a prisoner, he proved trustworthy and was put in charge of running the prison because "whatever he did, the LORD made to prosper" (Gen 39:23). He was promoted to the highest pinnacle of power in an extensive empire. In that position he was used to save many lives and to restore the fertile agricultural economy of Egypt.

3. Serving as One Sent by God

Joseph gradually came to understand that he had been sent by God. He could have lived out a story-line of victimization as someone who had been brutalized by his family, unjustly treated as a slave, wrongly accused and

forgotten in prison. But instead, he recognized that God was aiming at something far beyond his own well-being. God was using circumstances intended for evil and turning them toward good (50:20). Joseph told his brothers, "God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:5). Joseph is the first person in the story of Scripture who is said to have been expressly sent by God to accomplish mission of any kind.


4. Accomplishing God's Purpose

As Joseph stated it, the purpose God sent him to accomplish was simply to "preserve life." Joseph preserved the lives of his own family, but the grateful exclamation of the Egyptian people tells the greater story of lives saved throughout Egypt and Canaan: "You have saved our lives!" (47:25).

Without clarity about God's greater purpose unfolding over many years, it's doubtful that Joseph would have recognized that God had sent him at all. Joseph could have arranged that his remains would have been entombed in grand Egyptian style. Instead, he insisted that his remains be carried back to the land that God had promised Abraham (Gen 50:25, Heb 11:22). Joseph realized that he was pursuing a purpose that would be fulfilled beyond his own life span.

You Have Been Long Awaited

We know that Abraham gazed at the sky, counting the stars, believing that his family would number in the billions. But according to Jesus, Abraham saw more than the sky at night. He saw the day. The day of Christ. A day in which billions of his children would be blessed and be a blessing among all the peoples of earth. No wonder he was moved with joy.

Jesus said, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). 

Endnotes

1. Some observers have interpreted Joseph's action as a shrewd act of oppression denying impoverished people ownership of land. The account emphasizes that many lives were saved. When viewed in light of most famines that wiped out millions of people in the ancient world along the likelihood that many regimes would have allowed much of the population to slowly starve, it is possible to see Joseph's work as a work of salvation. But because there was a restoring of agricultural abundance, it should be considered an act of blessing.
2. In Genesis 12:2, the Hebrew expression "be a blessing" is in the imperative mood. Taken by itself this verb could be considered to be a clear command to Abram to somehow become a blessing. But even though the word itself is in the imperative mood, the grammar of the entire expression frames this phrase as a forceful way to express the purpose of the three cohortative Hebrew verbs immediately before it (to make Abram a great nation, to bless him, and to make his name great).