

Week 10 – A Momentous Journey – Genesis 46:1-27

Scripture Reading: Psalm 23

Introduction

When we began our consideration of the life of Joseph back in early September we noted that **Genesis 37:2** tells us:

These are the generations of Jacob, Joseph, being seventeen years old...

And we noted that the account of Joseph really isn't ultimately about Joseph but about his father, Jacob, and how God worked in and through the life of Joseph to make provision for the lineage of Jacob

Then we spent the next three weeks focusing on Joseph as we learned just what a remarkable man he truly was

We saw how he never took his eyes off of God and how he never seemed to become bitter or angry or vengeful

Neither did he become a fatalist who simply gave up or a slacker who sloughed off

Rather he kept his wits about him and labored diligently and faithfully in his duties as a slave for his master

So that God prospered him in everything he did and eventually, after ten years of menial servitude, he was elevated by his master to a position of greater authority

Then we saw how his master's wife lusted after him and falsely accused him of attempting to assault her when he rejected her bold advances

We saw how he was imprisoned and yet he still remained faithful so that the jailer put him in charge of all the other prisoners and how he was forgotten and betrayed by a fellow prisoner after doing a kindness for him

Then we saw how he was released from prison when God sent Pharaoh a pair of troubling dreams that Joseph was able to interpret

But not only did God give Joseph the proper interpretation of the dreams, he also gave him the plan for how to deal with the coming famine so that Pharaoh elevated Joseph to the second-most powerful position in Egypt

And after all that, we could be forgiven if we forgot that the account really wasn't about Joseph a fact we were reminded of when his brothers were reintroduced to the narrative in Chapter 42

Suddenly, the story wasn't about Joseph alone any longer as we read about Joseph's encounters with his brothers

And now as we open our Bibles to Chapter 46 the purpose behind the events of Joseph's life come into full view as we will see his father begin his journey to Egypt with his entire family in tow

This morning we come across another one of those unfortunate chapter divisions that occur from time to time in Scripture and we need to remember that the verse divisions, paragraphs, and chapter divisions we find in our English translations are not part of the inspired text

The men who placed all of those things where they are did a remarkable job but sometimes in their efforts to make things somewhat uniform they divided things up awkwardly

That's the case we find today as verses 28-34 of Chapter 46 really fit better with Chapter 47 so we will consider them next week when we look at Chapter 47

Before we dig into our text we need to consider some facts that will help us understand Jacob's experience as he undertakes his journey to Egypt and as we continue we are going to see **what Jacob's journey reveals about God**

Scripture reveals that Jacob has always been a fearful man – and when one considers how he lived; he had good reason to be fearful

He had swindled his brother out of his birthright and connived with his mother to steal his blessing by deceiving his father and as a result he had needed to run away to keep Esau from following through on his vow to kill him

Then he trembled in fear twenty years later as he headed back home to face Esau

And here we find Jacob is once more afraid as he reached the southernmost limit of Canaan, Beersheba

Beyond Beersheba lay a vast expanse of desert and then on the other side of the desert was Egypt

Jacob had never been beyond Beersheba and he had no idea what exactly to expect if he continued to travel southward

We need to remember that Jacob was a very old man when he undertook this journey

He was somewhere in the neighborhood of 130-years old and moving is a young man's game when life is made up of adventure and the excitement of new horizons beckon

And most people reach an age when the thought of moving becomes somewhat dreadful as they would prefer to stay put right where they are and just sit by the fire and relax – not strike out for parts unknown

Then we need to understand that what Jacob did know about Egypt was less than enticing

Egypt was known to be the most advanced nation in the world in Jacob's day and they were a well-developed and civilized people

But they were also pagans who served a multitude of false gods

In fact, Egypt could have been the inspiration for the portrait painted by Paul in **Romans 1:21-23**

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

They were smart and refined in many areas but when it came to God they were fools

And Jacob knew all too well how susceptible his family had been to the far less sophisticated sins of their neighbors in Canaan so he had to be fearful of how they might fare when faced with Egypt's temptations

We also need to recognize that Egypt was a place where bad things had happened to his grandfather, Abraham

It was in Egypt where Abraham hit the lowest point in his life when he lied about Sarah being his sister and not his wife

And it was only through God's act of intervention that Sarah and Abraham were protected from the pharaoh who reigned at that time

Jacob knew that his father, Isaac, had been told by God not to go down to Egypt during a previous famine (Genesis 26:2) because their blessing was to be found in Canaan

And, lastly, (**Genesis 15:13**) Jacob knew that **God had told Abraham that his descendants would be sojourners in a foreign land where they would be enslaved and afflicted** and he rightly deduced that Egypt might be that foreign land

Is it any wonder that Jacob was afraid at the moment of decision as he stood on the border of Canaan?

Change affects us the same way as the relative unknown makes us fearfully want to cling to familiar things and surroundings

As we age we find it more and more difficult to take on new ministries, spiritual endeavors, and new ways of doing things even when we don't have specific prophecy warning us of suffering ahead

Simply because we know that trouble comes to all men and it seems better to face it on familiar turf

So we shrink away from change

But there's one more really good reason why Jacob hesitated before committing fully to leaving Canaan

And it shows just how much he has grown and how much he has learned along the way

He hadn't yet heard directly from God

When his sons returned from Egypt with word and proof that Joseph was alive and beckoning them to come down to Egypt where he could protect them and provide for them, Jacob didn't hesitate once he was convinced

But when the realization that what *seemed to be* providential guidance at home might have been personal desire Jacob did what any wise person would do – he paused to seek God’s guidance

Look with me at **Genesis 46:1** – *So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.*

Beersheba was where God had appeared to Jacob’s father, Isaac, in a vision (**Genesis 26:24**) calling himself “*the God of Abraham your father*” and God gave Isaac assurance of his blessing which resulted in him building an altar to God there as we see in **Genesis 26:25**

So as Chapter 46 opens we see that Jacob is continuing on with the family worship of the one true God – the God of his father Isaac and, by extension, his grandfather Abraham

And as Jacob offered sacrifice to God in Beersheba it seems he did so primarily seeking guidance concerning his journey

Pausing to ask God if he is indeed leading is never a bad idea or a waste of time

As a much younger man, Jacob had tried to help God out by cheating his brother and lying to his father and he had wasted more than 20 years of his life while on the run

But now it seems he had learned that lesson as he stops to worship God and seek his will before continuing on with what seems to be right in his own mind

And God was ready and willing to give Jacob the guidance he sought as he came to him with the answer in a vision apparently that very night

As we look at what God had to say in those visions of the night we discover some very important truths about God

Follow along as I read God’s answer that we find in verses 2-4 (**Genesis 46:2-4**)

And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.”

The first thing I want us to notice is that God reveals that he is **the God of power and presence**

I. God of Power and Presence

This may not be readily apparent but God reveals his power in the names that he gives to himself

First God says, “*I am God*” which seems obvious enough

But the Hebrew word God uses to identify himself is *Hael* which means “Almighty God” or the “Strong One”

How encouraging it is to have the God who created the universe and keeps it ticking along each moment on your side!

Suddenly, all things seem possible as fear is dispelled

Using the name, *Hael*, indicates that God is proclaiming that he is able to help and to protect so Jacob should have no qualms about going to Egypt

Then God goes on to identify himself as *Elohim* the “Supreme God” of his father which would have reminded Jacob of God’s past faithfulness to Abraham and Isaac

So by using the descriptor, “*the God of your father*” God assured Jacob that he would deal with him faithfully just as he had done with his father – Jacob could count on God’s ability and faithfulness

Jacob may have been somewhat tentative about the journey to Egypt and what he would encounter there and God addressed those fears in his self-identification

But Jacob’s primary fear was likely the fear of acting contrary to God’s will

And God relieved that fear and gave Jacob the assurance that he was on the right path in verse 4 (**Genesis 46:4**) when he said, “*I myself will go down with you to Egypt*”

Crossing the desert would have still been a foreboding undertaking and Egypt itself would have still been a worrisome destination because of the ever-present threat of spiritual corruption and perhaps even physical enslavement there

But what a difference it had to have made to have the God of the covenant say, "I'll go with you and, not only that, I'll make sure you get back home"

That brings us to the second thing God reveals about himself in his answer to Jacob – he is **the God of purpose and promise**

II. God of Purpose and Promise

God promised to go to Egypt alongside Jacob as we've already seen but look with me at verse 3 (**Genesis 46:3**) to see what God says he will do there – God says:

*"I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, **for there I will make you into a great nation.**"*

God first made that promise to Abram in **Genesis 12:2** he had restated his promise to carry out that purpose through Isaac (**Genesis 17:19**) and now he reveals that his purpose still stands and that it would be fulfilled through Jacob

In previous sermons we've talked about how Egypt was an ideal place for the nation of Israel to grow and prosper

Because the Egyptians had a very strong aversion to intermingling with other races, there was little danger that they would seek to intermarry with the children of Israel as the people of Canaan were inclined to do

Therefore the Israelites would be allowed to grow in number while remaining apart from the negative cultural influences of their hosts

Hundreds of years had passed since God first made his covenant with Abraham and after all those years the promise to make him into a great nation had only been marginally fulfilled

God had promised Abraham that he would make his people as numerous "as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore" (**Genesis 22:17**)

But as we see in verse 27 of our passage (**Genesis 46:27**) 215 years after God made his promise to Abraham, there were only 70 true descendants who went down to Egypt in Joseph's day

Because it was in Egypt that God intended to grow his nation of chosen people from those 70 sojourners

And when they left Egypt in the exodus there were 600,000 men in their company not counting women and children as we see in **Exodus 12:37**

The men counted in the 600,00 were likely men of fighting age because that's how they counted back then (e.g. Numbers 1:45) so that means the seventy had grown to number at least 2-million total during their time in Egypt

No wonder the pharaoh at the time of the exodus was fearful of what would happen if the Israelites decided to revolt!

When God told Jacob he would bring him home again he was obviously assuring Jacob that his remains would be transported back to Canaan after he died – which they were 17 years later

But in a larger sense God was speaking of the return of the *nation* of Israel which he would also accomplish when the time was right – but that would take considerably longer

Today, we live in a very time-sensitive culture and we're a culture that values quick results

When we don't have immediate success we tend to become discouraged or worry that we've taken the wrong path

That's why we need to take careful note of passages like the one before us that show us that God doesn't work that way

At least not always, certainly there have been instances where God has given immediate and explosive results

But God often acts with careful deliberateness because God values permanence and a good foundation to build on more than speed if seeing immediate results would mean short-lived or shoddy results

So when we embark on a spiritual endeavor of some kind after we've become convinced that it's God's will; we mustn't become concerned or discouraged when the results don't come as quickly as we might like

Because God never fails in his promises and his purposes *will* be accomplished according to his perfect timing

The last thing I want us to notice that God reveals about himself in this account is that he is a **God of personalism**

III. God of Personalism

Our understanding of biblical theology informs us that God has personhood and that mankind was created in God's image as persons who possess many but not all of the attributes of God

And in the account before us we see that God cares about people and that he delights in interacting with them personally

Notice in verse 2 (**Genesis 46:2**) when God came to Jacob in his night visions **God called him by name** – in fact he called his name twice to get his attention

And we see God do this from time-to-time in the Bible

In **Genesis 22** we see God personally address Abraham and tell him to take his son Isaac and sacrifice him and then we see the angel of the Lord call to him by name to tell him by not to harm the boy when he was in the act of obedience

In **1 Samuel 3** we see God call to Samuel in the night when he was just a boy

And in **Acts 9** we see God personally address the apostle Paul on the road to Damascus when he still went by the name of Saul as he called out, "*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?*"

In each of those three instances, the person God addressed was at a crossroads in life and so was Jacob as we see here

And in each of those instances God proved that he stands eager to interact with us personally

God called Jacob by name and showed that he wasn't just some unimportant object to be used to achieve some end

God reaffirmed his covenant with Jacob as he reminded him that he was his personal God – the God of his family

And God promised to remain alongside him as a friend and helper as he traveled to and then sojourned in Egypt

Lists of People

But perhaps one of the best indicators that God is a God of personalism is the list of names that we find in verses 8-25

If you're like me you come across one of these lists in the pages of Scripture and you try to be interested in the names it contains

You might even try quoting **2 Timothy 3:16-17** to yourself as a kind of pep talk as you begin to read it –

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

After all, you want to find the profit in the list so that you can be complete and equipped for every good work

But in spite of your best efforts your eyes begin to glaze over after just a few lines and you find yourself glancing ahead to see just how long the list is so you can determine whether to slog on to the end or skip ahead

It's difficult to imagine less engaging reading than a long list of ancient names

And yet God's Word contains a lot of those lists which reveals something about God

God is interested in people – God cares about the people on those lists

Every name on each of those lists represents an individual life and a personal history that is important to God

God told Moses, "*I know you by name*" in **Exodus 33:17**

And to Cyrus, king of Persia, in **Isaiah 45:3** – "*...it is I, the Lord, the God of Israel, who call you by your name*"

Psalms 139 tells us of God's intimate knowledge of each person

God knew us before we were born, he knows precisely how each of us is put together and he knows how long we're going to last and he knows our thoughts even before we do

Then in the gospels we read how God knows how many hairs we have on our heads

But the emphasis God puts on personal names in his Word shows us that God doesn't view us as mere things, we aren't just another species of animal, and as individuals we aren't simply part of the collective whole as some would have us believe

Each person is an individual that is important to God

When we read the list of names in Genesis 46 we read them as individual names but we also recognize that those people made up the family of Jacob – they were a single group made up of individuals

No doubt the personalities within that group of people were diverse and I doubt they always got along

After all, we know the brothers hated Joseph so much they sold him into slavery

But here we find that they are all traveling together down to Egypt to face the future there together

There doesn't seem to be any disunity among them as they were all fully committed to a single destination and future as they left Canaan behind

Conclusion

I can't help but catch a glimpse of God's church in that description – or at least I see how God's church should be

The Body of Christ is also made up of a divergent group of people who often have differences of opinion

But we also need to recognize that we are on the same mission answering to the same Master

And we need to make every effort to remain unified

How exactly we go about that when we consider the diversity of gifts we have been given and the variety of ministries available where God has placed his children is a subject for another message

But what we need to understand today is that we must view the church as more than a group of people we voluntarily join with to do certain things – it's a family like Jacob's family – and it's a body

And as the Body of Christ in this place at this time we have a mission

It's the same mission that Jesus gave to his church just before he ascended to the Father

Now, how we go about expressing that mission is almost certainly going to be unique and will likely differ as time goes by

But the point is, we must be unified in moving forward in the mission that we have been given

And as we move forward we know that we have the same God of power and presence and purpose and promise and that God cares just as much for us as he did for Jacob and his clan

Let's pray