

A Place to Grow 4-6-08

Genesis 47

Our last chapter concluded with the family reunion in Goshen. Joseph had instructed his brothers as to what to say when they met the Pharaoh. Since Egyptians despised shepherds, and their culture and faith were so different from that of Egypt, Joseph was planning on obtaining the northeast corner of Egypt for his family. It had the best pastureland, and it would keep them separated until they were ready to return to their Promised Land.

So with that all too rare blend of integrity and political savvy, ¹ *Joseph went and told Pharaoh, "My father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and everything they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in Goshen."* Joseph did a little preparation work by mentioning their flocks and herds. He was reminding Pharaoh that they are shepherds and won't fit into Egyptian society. By mentioning their current location, Goshen, he may have also been putting the idea in Pharaoh's mind. Joseph is "proof that shrewdness is not alien to holiness." R. Kent Hughes

³ *Pharaoh asked the brothers, "What is your occupation?" "Your servants are shepherds," they replied to Pharaoh, "just as our fathers were."* ⁴ *They also said to him, "We have come to live here awhile, because the famine is severe in Canaan and your servants' flocks have no pasture. So now, please let your servants settle in Goshen."* They answered just as Joseph had instructed them, but they were a little more forward in asking directly for Goshen. After all, Pharaoh had told them the best of Egypt was theirs.

⁵ *Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Your father and your brothers have come to you, ⁶ and the land of Egypt is before you; settle your father and your brothers in the best part of the land. Let them live in Goshen. And if you know of any among them with special ability, put them in charge of my own livestock."* It worked! They were given the very best possible place for their herds, for their future development and even a job opportunity. Of course, this was all a part of God's plan. (Proverbs 16:9) While Canaan was becoming increasingly wicked, the nation of Israel was growing in a corner of Egypt where they could cling to the faith of their fathers.

In the placing of Israel in Goshen, we see Joseph and his brothers trying to do what they think would be best for them, but at the same time, the sovereignty of God placing them where they needed to be. God is setting in motion the fulfillment of what He told Abraham in Genesis 15:13. ¹³ *Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years."*

It is a mystery to me how that works. Did God foresee what they would do and just tell Abraham ahead of time, or did He prompt them to make those choices. Man is operating of his own will and yet God's will is being done. Our lives are the same. God has chosen the time and place in which you live. Listen to what the Apostle Paul preached in Athens. ²⁶ *From one man he made every nation of men, that they should*

Commented [notes1]: Proverbs 16:9 (NIV)
9 In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps.

inhabit the whole earth; and he determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. Acts 17:26 (NIV)

He planned where Israel would live so that they would grow and prosper in spite of adversity. He does the same with each of us. Why? The next verse tells us. ²⁷ *God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him, though he is not far from each one of us. Acts 17:27 (NIV)* The most important thing in life is to find God. It may be through blessing or it may be through difficulty, but whatever road we are destined to travel, what really matters in the end is finding God. (Matthew 16:26) Though the family of Israel would soon become slaves, it was right where they needed to be. It was where they could survive and multiply and cling to the God of their fathers. You and I are right where we need to be to reach out for God. Whatever we are going through, blessing or loss, God has allowed it that we might reach out to Him.

Commented [notes2]: Matthew 16:26 (NIV)
26 What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?

⁷ *Then Joseph brought his father Jacob in and presented him before Pharaoh... It was an official heads of state meeting. Jacob represented a people group, small though it was. After Jacob blessed Pharaoh, ⁸ Pharaoh asked him, "How old are you?" The greater blesses the lesser. The word "barak" can mean a greeting, and greetings often involved a blessing. It may have been something like, "Long live the king." Pharaoh had put Jacob's son over the land and was giving them a place to survive. Why wouldn't Jacob bless him? After all, didn't God authorize such a blessing when he told Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you?" (Genesis 12:3)*

Pharaoh asking his age was really a sign of respect. (Leviticus 19:32) In the ancient world, age was honored as having wisdom and understanding. A lack of respect for the aged was a sign of a decadent culture. (Deuteronomy 28:50) What does that say to us? Our culture has gone the other direction and like Rehoboam, son of Solomon (2Chronicles 10:8), we look to the young and beautiful to our own demise. I'm not making a political statement when I say, it is a sign of our times when we talk about a presidential candidate being too old. That is a spiritual indicator of what we value.

Commented [notes3]: Leviticus 19:32 (NIV)
32 "Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the LORD.

Commented [notes4]: Deuteronomy 28:50 (NIV)
50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young.

Commented [notes5]: 2 Chronicles 10:8 (NIV)
8 But Rehoboam rejected the advice the elders gave him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him and were serving him.

⁹ *And Jacob said to Pharaoh, "The years of my pilgrimage are a hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Egyptian literature said the ideal age to live to is 110. Jacob had passed that by a few decades, but it wasn't even close to Abraham's 175 years or Isaac's 180 years.*

Jacob's answer tells us a lot about his mindset. He saw his life as a pilgrimage. He knew this world was not his home. Even the Promised Land was not home. Like Grandfather Abraham, he was looking for city whose builder and maker is God. (Hebrews 11:10) Is your life a pilgrimage or do you consider yourself to be at home?

Commented [notes6]: Hebrews 11:10 (NIV)
10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.

He said his years were few and difficult. No matter what age we survive to, this life seems short. (James 4:14) He had sown difficulty in his youth by robbing his brother of his birthright and blessing, and he had reaped trouble and deception in his wives and sons. He fled for his life from his brother and father-in-law. There were a lot of painful memories. He would never have dreamed his later years would be in Egypt with Joseph as viceroy of the land. We never know where life will lead us, but we can

Commented [notes7]: James 4:14 (NIV)
14 Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

be sure that, if we are in Christ, it is all preparation for our heavenly home. Jacob blessed Pharaoh again and departed.

People were starving to death. Even the Egyptians were giving everything they owned for their daily rations. But the family of Israel had the promise of a daily supply of food. ¹² *Joseph also provided his father and his brothers and all his father's household with food, according to the number of their children.* My God will supply all your needs in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19) I've experienced the amazing provision of God in ways I can't explain in the natural. When I was teen and responsible for a group of people and some children, I remember praying and pleading with God to show me how to feed them. There was a knock on the door, and a lady had brought us bags of groceries. She just said God told her to do it and drove off.

Commented [notes8]: Philippians 4:19 (NIV)
19 And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

Another time, I was distributing tracts on one of the Hawaiian Islands with another young man. We didn't have a dime between us. We were both hungry as could be. The stores where we were just closed up and on one of the tables in front of one of the stores were two milk shakes. Everyone left. The two of us were standing there staring at those shakes filled right up to the lid. We waited awhile and then when we sure they had been left there, we drank the best shakes we ever had.

When Jesus told us not to worry about food, I think he meant it. (Matthew 6:25) Man spends so much of his energy assuring that his needs are met. Jesus told people that were flocking to Him that they were coming because they were miraculously fed. He warned them that they should be spending their efforts seeking out the food that is forever. (John 6:27) He went on to say something that our modern culture would mock like it was mocked back then. Eternal food comes from Jesus. God has set His seal of approval on Him! If you want the eternal food, you have to go to Jesus.

Commented [notes9]: Matthew 6:25 (NIV)
25 "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes?"

Commented [notes10]: John 6:27 (NIV)
27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

I think we are headed for a serious downturn in our economy. I hope I'm wrong, but if I'm right, we can be sure the Lord will meet our needs. We just need to put the Lord first and we will see that He is faithful to care for us. (Matthew 6:33) What if you lose that house you overextended yourself to purchase? You will learn a lesson on living within your means, and God will still care for you. What if you can only afford rice and beans? You'll find a new compassion for the majority of the world that never has much more than that. Is that so bad? I'm saying that you might not have all you desire, but the Lord will continue to look after you. (Psalm 37:25)

Commented [notes11]: Matthew 6:33 (NIV)
33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Commented [notes12]: Psalms 37:25 (NIV)
25 I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread.

The next part of the chapter tells us how Joseph dealt with the Egyptians. They first spent all their money, then their livestock, and finally, at their suggestion Joseph took their land and freedom in exchange for food so that they could live. Some people think this puts Joseph in a bad light or condones slavery. If keeping 80% of what you make is slavery, what do you call the taxes we pay?

Joseph's way of handling the situation gave the people a chance to maintain their pride. Indentured service was a well-accepted way to pay debt. They didn't have to beg or accept welfare. They purchased what they ate. They had nothing left when the famine ended, so Joseph provided seed for them to plant. This was a generous and humane solution. Remember, he was working for Pharaoh, and as an employee

of the state, he was bound to do his best for the state. No one ever did better. (Romans 13:1)

Verse 21 has some textual variations. Some say that Joseph reduced the people to servitude while others say he moved them into the cities. Both may be true.

25 "You have saved our lives," they said. "May we find favor in the eyes of our lord; we will be in bondage to Pharaoh." God saved the lives of the people of Egypt and many from Canaan and surrounding countries through His servant Joseph. They weren't angry with him for charging all they had; instead, they were honoring him for saving their lives.

There is a spiritual parallel to this in our own salvation. Jesus is the only One that has the bread of life. (John 6:51) He has an abundance and invites us to come. Though He does not charge anything, He does ask for us to lay down our lives. (Isaiah 55:1) We usually find it difficult to let go of things that we see as security. Just as the Egyptians gave up one thing after another, we find that we must forsake things to follow the Lord. In fact, Jesus said that if we don't forsake everything, we can't be His disciple. (Luke 14:33) Eventually we come to the place of giving our lives in service. The Apostles even called themselves the Lord's slaves. (Philippians 1:1) Jesus said, "If someone wants to be first, he must be your slave." (Matthew 20:27) But God's deal is even better than Joseph's. Joseph let them keep 80%, but Jesus promises to give us 100 times what we forsake in this life, and eternal life. (Matthew 19:29) When we come to our senses like the prodigal son and realize we are starving while there is bread in our Father's house, we look to Jesus and say, "You have saved our lives! May we find favor in the eyes of our Lord; we would be honored to serve You!" (Luke 15:17-19)

27 Now the Israelites settled in Egypt in the region of Goshen. They acquired property there and were fruitful and increased greatly in number. While the rest of the people were struggling to survive, the family of Jacob was prospering. God was blessing them in this temporary home. If you are debt free and living within your means, being faithful to increase your savings and giving to be a blessing, when hard times hit, you'll be in an advantageous place to multiply your assets and be an even bigger blessing. (Luke 6:38)

God used the ark of Egypt to multiply and bless the family of Jacob during the time of the famine. They bought property and grew in numbers. They were fruitful. That is just what we hope to experience while we are on our pilgrimage. Even if it is followed by a time of bondage, we can know it is all preparing us for our Promised Land.

Jacob was 147 and knew he would not live much longer. He had spent 17 years with Joseph in Egypt, the same number of years he had with him in Canaan. There is symmetry to it like the seven years of famine and seven of abundance. Do you think it is just coincidence, or is God showing us He is in the details?

Jacob called for Joseph and made him promise not to bury him in Egypt. He wanted to be buried in the Promised Land with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah. We saw the hand under the thigh pledge generations before when Abraham sent his servant

Commented [notes13]: Romans 13:1 (NIV)
1 Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Commented [notes14]: John 6:51 (NIV)
51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world."

Commented [notes15]: Isaiah 55:1 (NIV)
1 "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.

Commented [notes16]: Luke 14:33 (NIV)
33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Commented [notes17]: Philippians 1:1 (NIV)
1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons:

Commented [notes18]: Matthew 20:27 (NIV)
27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--

Commented [notes19]: Matthew 19:29 (NIV)
29 And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.

Commented [notes20]: Luke 15:17-19 (NIV)
17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! 18 I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. 19 I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men.'

Commented [notes21]: Luke 6:38 (NIV)
38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

to look for a bride for Isaac. (Genesis 24:2) It was an irrevocable vow. In Abraham's day it was to keep Isaac from the idolatry of the Canaanites by marrying a woman from Haran. Jacob believed God's promises and knew the family would eventually be back. This desire declared to the family that they were to stay separated from the Egyptians, because God had promised they would return to Canaan. When Joseph swore he would, Jacob worshipped the Lord, leaning on the top of his staff.

I wonder why they did not return to Canaan after the famine. Was it too comfortable there in Egypt? Did their prosperity keep them from returning? Did they decide to take advantage of the lush pasture while they could and then, before they knew it, they were serving the Egyptians? Could that be a warning for us? Where is your calling? Where should you be? If it isn't here, then what is keeping you from being where God has called you? The most uncomfortable place for a real Christian is a comfortable place. (1Timothy 5:6) That's because we have to struggle all the more with our flesh to do what God calls us to do. (Romans 8:7-8)

We are here in this world for a short time. This is our Egypt. The days of our sojourn are much like Jacob's, short and full of difficulty. Whether in difficulty or prosperity we know God is working for our eternal good. We know we are just passing through. As we sojourn here we grow and mature. We have the opportunity to bless others with the words of life. We comfort others with the comfort we have received from God. (2Corinthians 1:4) If we are led by the Spirit, we move like the wind to wherever God leads us to be of service to our King. (John 3:8) It's a training ground for eternity.

Like Israel, we have a place of promise too. (John 14:2) There is a place prepared for us in this world (Ephesians 2:10) and a place for us throughout eternity. We are to be growing and maturing here like the Israelites were in Egypt. That growing often comes with a great deal of hardship. Are you where God has called you, or where you are comfortable? That is not only a physical location, but in the way we live each day.

Once the nation had grown up in Egypt, God would send a deliverer, Moses. Once we have grown up, the Deliverer, Jesus, will come for us. He will lead us from this life into eternity. He is coming for His own, and what a joyous move that will be for those who live in Christ. When its time for me to graduate from this life, would you do me a favor and bury my bones facing the eastern sky? ²⁷ *For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.* Matthew 24:27 (NIV) ¹⁶ *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.* ¹⁷ *After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.* 1Thessalonians 4:16-17 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: Genesis 24:2 (NIV)
2 He said to the chief servant in his household, the one in charge of all that he had, "Put your hand under my thigh.

Commented [notes23]: 1 Timothy 5:6 (NIV)
6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives.

Commented [notes24]: Romans 8:7-8 (NIV)
7 the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so.
8 Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

Commented [notes25]: 2 Corinthians 1:4 (NIV)
4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

Commented [notes26]: John 3:8 (NIV)
8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

Commented [notes27]: John 14:2 (NIV)
2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

Commented [notes28]: Ephesians 2:10 (NIV)
10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.