

Now I Can Die 3-30-08

Genesis 46

In our last chapter in Genesis, we saw the dramatic unveiling of Joseph to his brothers. It was an emotion filled reunion in which the brothers were taught the wonder of the providence of God. They learned that even in the midst of their evil actions, God was at work keeping His promises and saving many lives. (Genesis 45:7-8) The chapter ended with them convincing Jacob (Israel) that Joseph was not only alive, but a ruler of Egypt, and he had invited them all to move to Egypt for the duration of the famine.

We begin our chapter for today with Israel moving to Egypt. No doubt he was anxious to see the favorite son that he for so long thought was dead. ¹ *So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.*

Did you notice the phrase, "with all that was his"? What happened to "forget about your stuff"? The Pharaoh had told Joseph to tell them to forget about their possessions because the best of Egypt was theirs. (Genesis 45:20) We saw how that relates to our worldly goods and our journey to heaven. It looks like Jacob just couldn't walk away from his worldly security, as if he didn't quite believe the extent of the promises or provision of the Pharaoh. And don't we have the same tendency? We cling to all the stuff even though we know we will eventually leave it all behind. (1Timothy 6:7)

Beersheba was a special place for Jacob's father and grandfather. Abraham had made it his home and built an altar there. (Genesis 21:33-34) Isaac saw a Theophany there and was promised over and over that God was with him. (Genesis 26:23-34) Jacob had left from there on his journey to Haran fleeing for his life. (Genesis 28:10) Once again he was leaving from there on a life-changing journey. He offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

I can't help but think that this must have been a time of serious reflection. The last time recorded that he had heard from God was before his favorite wife died. (Genesis 35:9) At that time, God called him to Bethel, a place where he had previously had an encounter with God. It is almost as if he had been avoiding returning to the place he named the House of God. It was there at Bethel that his mother's nurse, Deborah, died. After being obedient to God and worshipping Him there, his favorite wife, Rachel, died. Not that long after that tragic loss, Joseph's favorite son, Rachel's firstborn, was thought to have died. He went into a time of depression and could not be encouraged. (Genesis 37:35) We have no record of him hearing from God from then until now, some 22 years after Joseph disappeared.

Was he angry with God? It wouldn't surprise me. He may have reasoned, like we do, that God had told him to come to Bethel so he forsook all the idols in the

Commented [notes1]: Genesis 45:7-8 (NIV)
7 But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance.
8 "So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God. He made me father to Pharaoh, lord of his entire household and ruler of all Egypt.

Commented [notes2]: Genesis 45:20 (NIV)
20 Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours."

Commented [notes3]: 1 Timothy 6:7 (NIV)
7 For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it.

Commented [notes4]: Genesis 21:33-34 (NIV)
33 Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beersheba, and there he called upon the name of the LORD, the Eternal God.
34 And Abraham stayed in the land of the Philistines for a long time.

Commented [notes5]: Genesis 26:23-24 (NIV)
23 From there he went up to Beersheba.
24 That night the LORD appeared to him and said, "I am the God of your father Abraham. Do not be afraid, for I am with you; I will bless you and will increase the number of your descendants for the sake of my servant Abraham."

Commented [notes6]: Genesis 28:10 (NIV)
10 Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran.

Commented [notes7]: Genesis 35:9 (NIV)
9 After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him.

Commented [notes8]: Genesis 37:35 (NIV)
35 All his sons and daughters came to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. "No," he said, "in mourning will I go down to the grave to my son." So his father wept for him.

camp and obeyed. God made him promises, told him he had prevailed with God, and gave him a new name. So why would God then take his favorite wife and then taker her son as well? Isn't following God easier? Let me remind you of the keynote of our Palm Sunday message, "Blessed are those who mourn." (Matthew 5:4a)

Commented [notes9]: Matthew 5:4 (NIV)
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

My brother-in-law's wife just died. She had battled cancer for 3 years. They have two high school aged sons that were really attached to their mother. Will my brother-in-law be angry with God? I hope not, because God is the only One that can truly help us through the pain of that kind of loss. Directing our anger at God because of our circumstances is being angry at the wrong source. It is sin in the world that caused death and decay. (Romans 6:23)

Commented [notes10]: Romans 6:23 (NIV)
23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It was a shock to Jacob to find out the source of his long time grief was a lie, believing that Joseph was dead. He was probably angry with God. Now what was he to think? God had been working all that time to save him and his sons! What do you do when you find out the One you've been snubbing has been actively working to save you and your family from death? (John 3:17)

Commented [notes11]: John 3:17 (NIV)
17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

There is a lesson at the end of Job that reminds me to see the physical loss of loved ones from God's perspective. When Job was restored and healed, he ended up with twice the possessions he had before his ordeal. The only thing that did not double was his number of children. (Job 42:12-13) Why? They were not lost. They were doubled. They were just not all physically present. Those children that had gone before will be there in eternity. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. (1Thessalonians 4:13)

Commented [notes12]: Job 42:12-13 (NIV)
12 The LORD blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first. He had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, a thousand yoke of oxen and a thousand donkeys.
13 And he also had seven sons and three daughters.

I believe the revelation of Joseph being alive caused Jacob to repent of his anger toward God. Then he availed himself to hear from God through sacrifice. ² *And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, "Jacob! Jacob!" "Here I am," he replied.* God knows your name. I think He often calls it, but we rarely allow ourselves to listen. (Psalm 4:4) The humility from repentance put him in an attitude of listening. He heard his name and he responded by opening himself to the Word of God, "Here I am."

Commented [notes13]: 1 Thessalonians 4:13 (NIV)
13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

If it has been a long time since you heard from God, since you have availed yourself to His word, would you consider that the pain or self-dependence that took you in that direction is based on a misconception of God? (Jeremiah 29:11) He wants you to hear Him calling your name because He wants you to understand that He loves you and has a plan for your life. Even though you have turned your back to Him, He has still been working, just as He was in the life of Jacob. Let me remind you that this is the *toledot*, or account, of Jacob. We think of it as the story of Joseph, but that is not what the introductions told us. (Genesis 37:2)

Commented [notes14]: Psalms 4:4 (NIV)
4 In your anger do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. Selah

When Jacob finally heard God, He did not hear a rebuke or anger, but only love and mercy. ³ *"I am God, the God of your father," he said. "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there.* First, God

Commented [notes15]: Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)
11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.

Commented [notes16]: Genesis 37:2 (NIV)
2 This is the account of Jacob. Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

comforted him with the voice of direction. In the past, the family had been dealt with for choosing to go into Egypt. Now God was telling Jacob that it was indeed His will. That is where the promise given to his grandfather Abraham, which was repeated to his father and to him, would be fulfilled. (Genesis 12:2) When they leave Egypt the next time, they will be a great nation. Did he recall the prophecy to Abraham that it would be 400 years and that they would be mistreated there? (Genesis 15:13) It took great faith to walk away from the land that was promised and put the clan in a foreign land that abounded in foreign gods. That is why Jacob needed to hear, *"Do not be afraid to go..."*

Actually, it was the land of Canaan that would be more dangerous to the development of their faith. The Canaanites would become so vile in the next 400 years that God would order a merciful destruction of the people of that land to put them out of the misery their sins were causing one another. (Genesis 15:16) They would resist Egypt's religious influence for 400 years but succumb to the Canaanite gods when they return.

⁴ I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes." God promised to go with him. Jacob may have wondered if God would be with him. In that time, people associated gods with certain geographical areas. Jacob may have wondered if his neglect or even anger towards God meant he had to do this alone. He was learning how gracious God is. God was with him when he fled to Haran (Genesis 28:15), and now he would be with them in the land of Egypt.

If I were to interpret, *"I will surely bring you back again"*, I would think that it meant while he was living. But then, that would not be enough time to develop the people into a great nation there. That would ignore the prophecy to Abraham in Genesis 15. They were going to bury Jacob in the Promised Land. (Genesis 50:7) Remember that interpretation belongs to the Lord.

There are times when we hear something from God's word and take it as a promise, or God reveals something to us and we take it as a personal guarantee. We tend to interpret things as we would like to interpret them. Leave interpretation to the Lord.

Finally, Jacob was assured that Joseph would close his eyes. Joseph was indeed there in Egypt and would not die before Jacob. Jacob would not have to experience that sense of loss again. That had to be a great comfort to him.

Verse 6 reminds us again that Jacob took ALL his stuff. Even though he had met with God again and had his faith renewed, he was still clinging to worldly things and doubting the greatness of what God was doing.

Then we have the list of all the children of Israel, in the clans by which mother gave birth to them. The totals show that both wives had twice as many children as their maids. There are some grandchildren mentioned as well. If the list is complete, only two of Judah's sons died in Canaan. They were a hearty lot!

Commented [notes17]: Genesis 12:2 (NIV)
2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

Commented [notes18]: Genesis 15:13 (NIV)
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.

Commented [notes19]: Genesis 15:16 (NIV)
16 In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure."

Commented [notes20]: Genesis 28:15 (NIV)
15 I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

Commented [notes21]: Genesis 50:7 (NIV)
7 So Joseph went up to bury his father. All Pharaoh's officials accompanied him--the dignitaries of his court and all the dignitaries of Egypt--

There is some discrepancy in the ancient texts as to the exact number but we can be sure it was around 70 direct descendents. That is a number implying totality. No one was left behind. It was a caravan with the entire family loaded with everything they had and all they had been given. The herds went with them. It was a complete tribal migration.

²⁹ *Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time.* What a reunion! The first question Joseph asked his brothers when he revealed his true identity was, "Is Dad really still alive?" (Genesis 45:3) He had longed for this reunion for over two decades, such was the bond of love they had for one another. Now they are united again in this life. He wept for a long time. His father had surely aged so much that it was difficult to see him looking so old. They wept for their years apart. They wept for the joy of being reunited. They wept for the wonderful plan of God working in the midst of the chaos of sin in the world.

³⁰ *Israel said to Joseph, "Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive."* Almost two millennia later, Simeon will say something very similar when he sees the baby Jesus coming into the Temple. ²⁹ *"Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you now dismiss your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen your salvation, ³¹ which you have prepared in the sight of all people, ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."* Luke 2 (NIV)

Some people live focused upon one thing. It may be a great goal. It may be a relationship. Israel's desire was his familial relationship with his favorite son. Simeon raised the bar in making that life dream about salvation for all people. Though Joseph became the salvation of Israel, I don't believe that is why Israel was so attached to him. Jacob's desire was a personal relationship he highly valued. Simeon, by contrast, shared the heart of God. He wanted to see God's salvation come into the world for all people. Simeon saw himself as part of a great story in a much clearer way than Jacob did.

Can I ask you to consider something? What would bring you such contentment that, if it came to pass, you could say you were ready to die? What would so fill you with a sense of fulfillment that you would feel your life complete? If it is a relationship restored, that is a wonderful thing, but to fulfill your God given calling is even greater. Finding your part in God's great story is what gives life real meaning. If you find what is worth dying for, you'll know what is worth living for. If there is a disconnect between those two, you need to be honest with your own heart. It's not likely you'll die for Him if you are refusing to live for Him.

The chapter closes with one more wonderful act of sovereignty. Egyptians despised shepherds. Perhaps it was the lice, or perhaps the smell of animals. Whatever the reason, it had them avoiding the very pastureland the Hebrews would find most favorable. What are the chances of that?

Commented [notes22]: Genesis 45:3 (NIV)
3 Joseph said to his brothers, "I am Joseph! Is my father still living?" But his brothers were not able to answer him, because they were terrified at his presence.

When my family lived in Japan, we had one of the most beautiful spots you could imagine. It was only about ten minutes from town, but for most people it was too remote. The land sat in a little indentation in the side of a mountain canyon. It was sheltered from harsh winter winds. Fresh water flowed from the mountain down past our home. The creatures of the mountain would come and play in the meadow in front of us, including mountain monkeys. Locals couldn't figure out why we would want to live in that remote place. God was saving it just for us.

That was Goshen to the Hebrews. It was the best pastureland in the Middle East. It was ideal for their lifestyle, but detested by Egyptians. In the midst of the difficulty of living in a fallen world, we should notice the little blessings so generously supplied by our God. (1Thessalonians 5:18) We often overlook them. Here, where we live, we have no excuse for overlooking them. The scenery sings to us everyday of the wonder of God whose mighty hand formed these vistas.

Commented [notes23]: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 (NIV) 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

The Hebrews settled in to the place they would be for the next 400 years. The best of Egypt was theirs. God had ordained it so. It was the northeastern edge of the kingdom where they could develop without the corrupting influence of Egypt's paganism.

What does this chapter speak to us? What can we bring home? Well, for those of us who have lost those we had set our heart upon, I hope you heard the lesson of Jacob's life. Don't blame God. Run to Him, not from Him. Don't let the fallen nature of this world keep you from the One who can see you through.

If you've been worshipping with reserve, go to God again, this time with an open heart and open ears. What He has to say to you is not rebuke, but blessing. He's been waiting for you to return, so that He can show you His eternal purposes. (Malachi 3:7b)

Commented [notes24]: Malachi 3:7 (NIV) 7b Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.

What is your life about? What would bring such fulfillment that you would be ready to leave this world? So few find it. Fewer still live it, but what a treasure to know what is worth not only dying for but also living for each day. (John 10:10) Find your part in His story.

Commented [notes25]: John 10:10 (NIV) 10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Simeon found it. He found the Messiah and knew He is the light to us Gentiles and the glory of Israel. He knew man no longer needed to walk in darkness. The light of life had come. (John 12:46) That is what is worth living and dying for. Nothing else comes close. Relationships like Joseph and Jacob had are wonderful, but they are a far cry from knowing our Creator and the reason for our existence.

Commented [notes26]: John 12:46 (NIV) 46 I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

And finally, don't miss the little blessings. They surround us every day. They sing to us of the love of God. They are overlooked by most, but what a difference they can make in our daily attitude and temperament. If you notice the hand of God in the little things, the great difficulties can be more bearable. May God give us eyes to see the blessings and a heart to live for Jesus!