

## Moving Time! Stepping Out in Faith

Genesis 45.16-46.30

God keeps His word! He told Abraham his descendants would go to a foreign land, and now they are traveling to Egypt. On the way, He reminds Jacob that He will make them a great nation, but little could Jacob have known then *how!* God's providential power is on display.

Scene 1: Going home to get dad and all the family (45.16-28)

- *They go with lavish provisions from Pharaoh (16-23)*
- *This is a time for joyful reunion, not recriminations (24-28)*

Scene 2: Remembering God's Promises on the way (46.1-7)

- *Jacob at Beersheba – a place rich with meaning for him*
- *God repeats His promise: 'I'll make you a great nation!'*

Scene 3: The Family together in Egypt (46.8-30)

- *After a troubled life, Jacob's 'future nation' is ready to grow*
- *Jacob reunited with Joseph: A happy ending!*

Only God can turn  
 a **MESS** into a  
 message, a **TEST** into a  
 testimony, a **TRIAL** into  
 a triumph, a **VICTIM**  
 into a victory.

Take your Bibles and turn to Genesis 45. This morning we'll be in both Genesis 45 and 46, and we won't be reading the whole text, so you'll need to follow along.

One of the things that is unique about the Bible, and that reflects its historicity, is the way it includes unnecessary details. For example, in our passage today, we read details about Joseph's brothers going back to Canaan to pick up their father, and bring him to Egypt, and there is a complete list of the names of all the brothers' children and grandchildren. Parts of Genesis 46 can feel like reading the phonebook! But we'll discover today God has a reason for all that he has included in His Word.

To get our bearings – it's a happy time for the family of Jacob, although Jacob doesn't know it yet! Joseph and his brothers have been reconciled – as we saw in the first half of Gen 45 last week, there were hugs and tears all around when Joseph revealed who he was, and forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery. But he is anxious to see his father again, and thus unfolds a three-act drama in which his brothers make the 200 mile trip from Egypt back to Canaan, tell their father that his favorite son is alive, and return to Egypt, where – although they don't know it now – they will stay for 400 years, until they emerge no longer as a family, but a nation.

Moving isn't easy. Maybe you've moved from one home to another. Jen and I have moved overseas three times: All the packing, going through things, deciding what to keep and what to throw out, what to give away and what to sell. It can be a nightmare!

And there are other kinds of ‘moves’ in our lives, too. We all know the feeling -- a mixture of uncertainty and excitement -- when we are facing big changes in our lives. It may be when we leave home for college, get married, or start a new career. This is the setting for today's narrative. Jacob and his whole family are moving from Canaan to Egypt. It is a time of uncertainty, and it is a time to trust God.

Scene 1: Going home to get dad and all the family (45.16-28)

Our story opens in Gen 45.16 with Pharaoh getting the news of Joseph's family (read vv16-18):

*Now when the news was heard in Pharaoh's house that Joseph's brothers had come, it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Say to your brothers, 'Do this: load your beasts and go to the land of Canaan, and take your father and your households and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you will eat the fat of the land.'"*

- They go with lavish provisions from Pharaoh (16-23)

Pharaoh loads the children of Israel with the best Egypt has to offer, all the provisions they need, and 20 donkeys loaded with goods and food for their father. The narrator is highlighting something for us: Joseph came to Egypt as a slave, and his brothers came to Egypt to get grain to keep them alive. Now they are leaving Egypt with riches, and are promised the best of the land by Pharaoh. The lesson: God takes care of His children.

I hesitate to say that, because there's always the chance someone is going to take that wrongly. The teaching that God wants you to be rich, and if you're good, He'll make you 'healthy, wealthy, and wise' has infected Christians today.

Years ago when I was in Bible college, a home supplies sales company became very popular among students, and many signed up to become distributors. An older student took me on a drive up the Columbia River Gorge in his new Camaro, and played a tape of a well-known preacher who said that God wanted us to be rich, and if we signed up with this company we'd experience God's blessing. A lot of students signed on, and many spent years selling products out of their garages...but of course, only those at the top of the 'pyramid' got rich.

Our simplistic, short-sighted view of God's blessing is that we get rich. God plan is much better: He provides for our needs, and gives a contentment that all the riches in the world can never buy.

Paul captures both these truths in his letter to the church at Philippi. These Christians supported Paul financially on his missionary journeys; sometimes he had plenty of financial support, other times not enough. In Philippians 4.11 he writes, *I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am*. That's the *contentment* God gives when we trust in Him.

Later in Philippians 4, he writes: *My God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus (19)*.

See how those two go together: We trust the Lord, and He provides for our needs, and at the same time we are content with what He has given us. That's one lesson.

- This is a time for joyful reunion, not recriminations (24-28)

There's another in vv24-28. You'll see it in v24: *So he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, "Do not quarrel on the journey."* Why did Joseph tell his brothers not to quarrel? We're not told, but let me suggest two things they might quarrel about: It might be possessions – who gets what. *Because it is in times of blessing that we often fight.* Hard times? They bring us together. A happy, poor family wins the lottery, and it destroys them. This is true of God's children, too.

Or it might have been what they were going to tell their father. They'd been lying to him for 22 years. Now they were going to have to tell him what they did...so who gets the blame?!

Whatever it was, there's a lesson here: Don't let Satan steal your joy when you experience God's blessing. The child of God can be content with little, and joyful when he has much. This is a time for the brothers to let their hearts be filled with joy, not recriminations.

They arrive at home, tell their father Joseph is alive; he is stunned and in disbelief at first, but when he sees all the riches they have brought, his spirits are lifted. And off they all head to Egypt.

Scene 2: Remembering God's Promises on the way (46.1-7)

- Jacob at Beersheba, a place rich with meaning for him

The second scene in our three-act drama occurs on the way, when they get to Beersheba. Beersheba was a place rich with meaning for Jacob, his father Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham. It was especially significant for Jacob, because the last time he left Canaan, 60 years before when he fled from his brother Esau, he left from Beersheba. Now he is leaving again – and he looks back and sees how faithful God has been to him, and stops to offer sacrifices to God. And God meets him there.

- God repeats His promise: 'I will make of you a great nation!'

In Gen 46.3-4, we read God's words to him: *He said, "I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you a great nation there. "I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes."*

Jacob grew up with his grandfather Abraham, who lived until he was fifteen. No doubt Abraham told him about God's promises to them; one of those promises was this:

*Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. (Gen 15.13-14)*

God puts the pieces of the puzzle together for Jacob: *His family is going down to Egypt, but they will come out of it again, and when they do, they will be a great nation.*

### Scene 3: The Family together in Egypt

- After a troubled life, Jacob's 'future nation' is ready to grow

The final scene is recorded in Genesis 46.8-30. A list of all the names of Jacob's sons, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren are listed. Most of these people are never heard from again – they appear on the stage of Scripture for a moment, then disappear. Why list them?

God is signifying that despite all the troubles Jacob went through in his life, his family is ready to grow, and they are going to become a great nation. After listing all the names, the narrator tells us this (46.26-27):

*All the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob's sons, were sixty-six persons in all, and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy.*

The significance of the number seventy is important. In Gen. 10 there is a list of nations that came from Noah's three sons; there were 70 in all. The number 70 signified completeness, and although the children of Jacob are not yet a nation, they will become one, and through that nation all the people of the earth will be blessed.

- Jacob reunited with Joseph: A happy ending!

In vv28-30, Joseph is reunited with his father Jacob after more than 22 years apart. We might paraphrase v30 this way; Jacob says, *I can die a happy man, because I have seen you again after all these years.* It happens that Jacob will live another 17 years in Egypt, in the fertile land of Goshen – but to borrow from the children's stories, it is certainly true that 'he lived happily ever after.'

Now you might say that this passage doesn't teach us much, but you'd be wrong. This part of the Joseph story doesn't have commands for us to obey, but it is God's 'show and tell.' Remember 'show and tell'? Someone brought something to class to show and tell you about.

Here, God shows His sovereign hand in the providential events accompanying the move of Israel to Egypt. First, He shows that *He provides abundantly for His children in a time of uncertainty and change.* The nation of Israel has been on the move much of the last 4000 years – but every time they do, they have God's promise of His provision.

Second, what God has promised, He will never forget, and He will always fulfill. *What God promises He never forgets, and He always fulfills.* God told Abram that his descendants would live in a foreign country, but that they would come out again; on the way to Egypt, God tells Jacob not to be afraid to go, because God is going to bring His people back out of Egypt, and when He does, they are going to be that great nation that He promised to Abraham!

Third, *even when our lives seem like a trial, God is able to bring us to a happy ending. And listen: God likes happy endings!* So time and again, all through the story of Israel in the Old Testament, and in the great stories in the history of Christianity, despite all the hard times, we read of God bringing them peace, forgiving their wrongs, defeating their enemies, providing for their needs. And always, beyond the years of time, there is the promise of a place where God's people 'live happily ever after.'

At the end of C. S. Lewis' book, *The Last Battle*, on the last page of the last book in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, Aslan the lion speaks to Peter, Edmund and Lucy:

"There was a real railway accident," said Aslan softly. "Your father and mother and all of you are – as you used to call it in the Shadowlands – dead. The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning."

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever: in which every chapter is better than the one before. (C. S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 228)

Whatever part of your journey you're on today, whatever trials you may be facing, trust in God's provision and His promises.

And remember: God is a God of happy endings. The last journey we will all take comes after this life, and that is the one to be ready for. God's Son Jesus offers you new life and a home in heaven. Believe in Him and receive it today!

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What a difference a day can make... In one day, Joseph went from being the favorite son in a family of twelve children to a slave in a foreign country. In one day he went from being personal assistant to the captain of Pharaoh's bodyguards to falsely imprisoned for sexual assault. In one day he went from being imprisoned slave to the 'Prime Minister' of all Egypt! And in one day he went from being unknown to his brothers to being reconciled and reunited with them.

## Digging Deeper

1. In Genesis 45.16-23, the excitement is palpable! The family of Jacob is all moving to Egypt! Pharaoh gets in the act, lavishing provisions on the brothers and promising the family the best of Egypt! Why do you think Pharaoh is so accommodating? There is another aspect of ‘God’s economy’ on display here as well; read Ecclesiastes 2.24! This will be magnified when the Israelites leave Egypt in 400 years (see Exod. 12.35-36).
2. In 45.24-28, two events invite reflection. First, in v24, Joseph tells his brothers not to “quarrel on the journey” home. What do you think they may have quarreled about? (What were they going to have to reveal to their father?) Second, when they get home and tell Jacob that Joseph is still alive, Jacob is stunned, and does not believe them. What changes his mind? What other effect does Joseph being alive have on him?
3. Genesis 46.1-7 ties this move to Egypt into the bigger scheme of God’s plan to make a great nation, and ultimately, through that nation, to bless all the families of the earth. Jacob stops to worship Yahweh at Beersheba. What other events in Genesis occurred at this place (see Gen. 21, 22, 26, and 28). Jacob left from here when he fled to Haran; now he is leaving the land of promise again, to Egypt. In Genesis 15, God made a promise to Abraham (see vv13-14); what details does God add here? With our knowledge of subsequent history, how does this affect your view of God’s sovereign power? *How much can we trust Him?*
4. The final ‘scene’ in the move of Jacob’s whole family to Egypt is the listing of all those who made the journey and the account of Jacob and Joseph meeting. The narrator emphasizes that *all the persons of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy in number (27)*. What is the significance of the number 70? (You’ll have to look for this.) Jacob’s meeting with Joseph is emotional; Jacob ends his life at peace. Despite a life filled with deceit, conflict, family disputes, and awful violence, God has brought good. *Imagine what God can do with our lives!*