

Israel in Egypt

HN 26/09/04 pm

Reading: Genesis 46, I Peter 2

Study: Genesis 46

Psalms: 100, 18:1-6, 105:1-5, 105:6-8

It is enough. Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die (45:28). Jacob was convinced by the words of his sons and by the sight of the carts sent by Pharaoh. His favourite son who he thought was dead was alive. It was as if his son had been raised from the dead. For over 20 years, he had grieved for him. Now his soul was revived. He set out from Hebron to go down to see Joseph in Egypt.

In this chapter, the focus of the narrative turns back to Jacob. It is after all the history/genealogy of Jacob that we are reading (37:2). Jacob was the one bearing the promises of God originally given to Abraham. To Jacob and his descendants the land of Canaan was promised.

At Bethel God appeared to Jacob to give him a new name and to reaffirm the promises – land, descendants and blessing upon all nations (ch.35). That was the last time that God appeared to him – as he re-entered the land of Canaan. In this chapter as Jacob makes this momentous decision to go down to Egypt, the Lord appeared to him again to reaffirm his promises.

Why did the Lord reveal himself to Jacob at this time? Why do we call it a momentous decision? He was just going down to see his son. He was only going down so that they might survive the severe famine in Canaan. And he did not own anything in Canaan – just a small plot of ground.

Jacob would have remembered, as you will, how famine forced Abraham to go down to Egypt. It was a disastrous visit in which he deceived Pharaoh, and put the promise of descendants at risk when Pharaoh took Sarah for his wife. God intervened to save Abraham and keep the promises intact.

Isaac also experienced famine in Canaan – but the Lord appeared to him saying ‘*do not go down to Egypt*’ (26:2). He told him to remain in Canaan, the land promised to his father Abraham.

Now Jacob, because of a severe famine was on his way to Egypt. He got to Beersheba on the southern border, the place where Isaac dwelt for some time. He was about to leave the promise land. This was a momentous decision for him to make in the light of this family history and the promises of God.

Jacob stopped at Beersheba and *offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac*. He worshipped God by offering sacrifices. He called on the name of the Lord. And a

wonderful thing happened. That night God spoke to him in a vision. God called out to him – Jacob, Jacob!

God spoke to the boy Samuel as he attended to worship in the house of the Lord (I Samuel 3:10). ‘Samuel, Samuel!’ he called and on the third time Samuel said ‘speak Lord for your servant hears’. Jacob said ‘*Here I am.*’

In worship, in true worship in the Spirit, we draw near to God. We come to thank him, to praise him and to hear his voice. Many men and women have been touched by the Lord as they worshipped him. The Lord wants to reveal himself to us – he wants us to know him and his will.

He spoke to Jacob about going down to Egypt. He will speak to you about his will for your life also – if you will *be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God* (Romans 12:2). Do you come to worship ready to hear his voice? Worship should be a time of drawing near to God in our hearts by faith.

What was the message the Lord had for Jacob? *I am God, the God of your father. Do not fear to go down to Egypt for I will make of you a great nation there. I will go down with you to Egypt.*

Why should Jacob fear? Like Abraham, he might have thought there was no fear of God in this place. His sons had come back after their visits very afraid – and they had not even met the Pharaoh yet. Going to a new place would bring uncertainties and fears. God's promise to go with him was a great comfort.

But his fears were probably related to the promise of God, and the future of his family. Jacob was 130 years old. He knew he did not have much longer to live. He was taking all his family down and he may well die in Egypt. What would be come of the promises then? God reassured Jacob – *I will surely bring you up again and Joseph will put his hand on your eyes* – or Joseph will close your eyes in death.

Let us look briefly at the promises in the light of this journey to Egypt.

Land

Egypt was a rich and fertile land. Pharaoh said to Joseph ‘*bring your father and your households; I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you will eat of the fat of the land*’ (45:18). Frequent famine made life in Canaan a struggle. In Egypt, there was plenty and now they had been invited to come and settle in the land of Goshen. Joseph said he would provide for them. Already he had given them lots of food and new clothes.

In this land of plenty, in prosperity would they forget the promise of God? Would they forget the promise of land? After all, they had been waiting for so long – since the days of their great grandfather Abraham. Still they had no land. Jacob had every reason to fear for his family as he went down to Egypt.

Prosperity leads many to neglect the promises of God. *Give me neither poverty nor riches* writes Agur (Proverbs 30) – *lest I be full and deny you and say who is the Lord*. The church in Laodicea boasted – *I am rich and have become wealthy and have need of nothing* (Revelation 3). The word of the Lord was *repent*. Do not be deluded; do not become blind to the promise of God. Persevere in the way of the Lord for Jesus is coming again.

Prosperity threatened the family of Jacob just as it threatens many today. Self-sufficiency, trusting in self, living for the comforts of this world. Such things have choked the life out of many Christians. What did Jesus say in the parable of the sower? The seed sown among the weeds. This is the person who hears the word but the cares of this world, the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word and he becomes unfruitful (Matthew 13:22).

As we know, God brought Jacob's family into slavery, into great suffering before Moses led them out of Egypt by a great deliverance. Eventhen, some wanted to return to the luxury of leeks and garlic of Egypt!

Descendants

The promise of God to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob was that they would have many descendants and would become a great nation. This nation was to be a holy nation, the chosen people of God.

Abraham would not allow his son Isaac to take a Canaanite wife. Isaac told Jacob – *you shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan* (28:1). Esau had married Canaanites. Jacob's son Judah had gone off to marry Shua, a Canaanite (ch.38), and Simeon apparently had a Canaanite wife also (46:10).

There was this ever-present danger confronting the people of God in Canaan. With intermarriage came idolatry and apostasy. The Canaanites were quite happy to intermarry with Jacobs children as we saw at Shechem. Such intermarriage threatened the establishment of the people of God.

In Egypt, this threat was largely removed. How is this you ask? Jacob and his family were all shepherds. Joseph emphasized this when he went to Pharaoh and he told his brothers to make this point also. Why was this important? Well Joseph wanted them to dwell in the land of Goshen when he could look after them. But there was more to it than this.

Every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians (46:34). Although living in Egypt the children of Israel would have had little contact with the Egyptians. This disdain for shepherds would have kept them insulated from the local people. They would not have been tempted to intermarry with the ungodly. So although they were away from the promise land, the children of Israel were in fact more protected from the danger of intermarriage. God planned to establish them as a nation here in the middle of Egypt!

It goes without saying that along with the lure of prosperity, marriage with unbelievers had drawn many away from the church in our day. The Christian family is precious in God's sight. He seeks godly offspring (Malachi 2:15). Marriage to an unbeliever jeopardizes this plan of God – as does divorce. Where are all the godly offspring today?

Blessing to the nations

This was the third aspect of the promise. God was building his nation down in Egypt in order that that nation be blessing to all the earth. From this nation would come the seed, Jesus Christ, through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

Today God is building his church, for his church stands as a witness to the world of the promise given to Abraham. The church has been entrusted with the gospel of Jesus Christ. We are his people. Let us be that holy nation, let us proclaim *the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvellous light, who were once not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but have now obtained mercy* (I Peter 2:9-10).

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