

GENESIS

Lesson 39 - Chapters 46 and 47

With this chapter, the era of the Patriarchs truly closes. Abraham and Isaac are dead, and Jacob (a very old man) is in the midst of moving the Israelites out of Canaan, into Egypt, and into the authority of Joseph and Judah. And, soon, Jacob will go to be with God. After moving the family to Egypt, Jacob has but one duty left: to pronounce the all-important blessings upon his sons; the blessings that officially transfer wealth, power, authority, and responsibility to his successors. We will see the prophetic saga of these blessings beginning in chapter 48, and will discuss the whole matter in great depth when we get there.

It is interesting to note the use of the word "Israelites" in this chapter; because the clan of Israel had now grown sufficiently to border on warranting nation-status.

READ GEN 46 all

Let's examine for a moment what Jacob's mindset must have been about their leaving Canaan, and going down to Egypt to join his most beloved son, Joseph. Of course, he was grateful beyond measure that his long lost son was alive, and soon, he would be back together with him. And, he was now certain that his clan, the 12 tribes of Israel, would survive the famine that had gripped the world, due to Joseph's ability to care for them. But, Jacob wondered what would be the more long-term result of their migration to Egypt. Was this about to become the fulfillment of the prophecy about the Hebrews' fate, given in a dream to his grandfather Abraham, so many years earlier? Jacob would have known all about this prophecy, and would have heard it from his grandfather's own mouth, and again from his father Isaac's; and it disturbed him....it made him anxious and afraid.

Let's back up a second and remember those prophetic words of God to Abraham, in Genesis 15:12-16. ***NAS Genesis 15:12 Now when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. 13 And God said to Abram, "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. 14 "But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve; and afterward they will come out with many possessions. 15 "And as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. 16 "Then in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete."***

Jacob well knew that if his taking his family to Egypt to survive the famines was the time and fulfillment of what God spoken of to Abraham (and, what else could it be?), that he would die down in Egypt, and that Jacob was in essence removing his family from the promised land for the purpose of their becoming enslaved in Egypt.... for an extended period of time. He knew

that 4 centuries would pass before his family would once again be free and move back to the land promised by God to the Hebrews.

By the way, its this same passage in Genesis 15 that makes many a bible scholar convinced that a biblical “generation” is 100 years.....because the scripture says here that the Israelites are going to be in Egypt for 400 years, and it also speaks of that time period as being of 4 generations.

And, so, after the Israelites packed up and began their journey down to Egypt..... probably beginning from Hebron..... they stopped at Be'er Sheva and there Jacob had a vision: and in that vision God addressed the fear and dreaded anticipation of what might lay ahead for Israel and his family. And, in V3 God tells Jacob not to be afraid to take his family down into Egypt, for it is there that God had prepared a place for the Israelites to grow from a rather smallish group of 70 individuals, into a **great** nation (and Jacob had no clue just HOW great a nation it would, in time, become). And, God confirms to Jacob that indeed he will breathe his last there, but that his remains will not forever rest in Egyptian sand. God will see to it that he is brought back to the land of his ancestors.

In verse 1 we're told that Jacob offered sacrifices at Be'er Sheva in preparation for this momentous migration; actually, in Hebrew it says Jacob offered **zevachim**. **Zevah**, or its plural **zevachim**, is a very specific KIND of sacrifice, one of several that we will learn about when we get to the book of Leviticus. While the **Zevah** (as are at least a portion of all sacrificial offerings) is laid on the fire of the Great Bronze Altar, this is not “THE” Burnt Offering.....a term that is only a general one for all the various kinds of sacrifices that are to be burned up.

And, since sacrifices are never made on the ground in a common fire, it means Jacob would have had to have used an altar. His father, Isaac, had built and used an altar in Be'er Sheva many years earlier, and very probably this was the same one. In fact, even though the verses do not explicitly say that it was Isaac's altar that Jacob used, the fact that it says Jacob sacrificed to “the God of his father Isaac” all but assures it. For, altars were always built and dedicated to specific gods, and therefore when an altar was being referred to, it was called by the location it was in, who built it, and the god it honored.

In verse 4 we have a reminder of the standard Middle Eastern cultural mindset of that era: that gods were territorial. Yes, it was an unquestioned belief that gods observed national borders, and for whatever reason, Jacob and his family still generally thought the same way all the other world cultures did, and Yehoveh had apparently not tried (terribly hard) to enlighten him and explain the reality of that error. So, naturally, one of Jacob's fears was that once he crossed the boundary of Canaan and entered Egypt, he would leave behind the influence and protection of his own God, Yehoveh, and now be subject to Egypt's gods. God says, therefore, “ I Myself will go down with you to Egypt and I Myself will bring you back”. In other words, Jacob's God would take the unusual step of crossing the territorial boundaries and accompanying Israel on his migration. This was not the usual operating method for a god, but it must have been a welcome surprise for Jacob, even if he did not understand how Yehoveh could just change all the god etiquette that had been established over the centuries.

As we continue in Torah, then eventually leave it and get into the book of Joshua, we're going to encounter all sorts of interesting comments like this one about God going with Jacob, that are typically brushed aside as but ancient figures of speech. Trust me: these are not at all superfluous figures of speech but rather conversations and oracles about matters that were very real to the minds of those ancient Hebrews.

Verse 5 tells us that a sufficient number of wagons had been sent for all of Israel to bring their possessions with them. But, of course, the most important possession of Israel was the people; and what is being communicated here is that ALL of Israel's family moved to Egypt; none stayed behind.

Now, allow me to let you in on a little secret: verses 8 through 25, and possibly even verses 26 and 27, were either ADDED to this text at a later date.....OR.....they were significantly modified from the original at a later time. How do we know this? Because the numbers don't add up for the time setting we're in, and we find that when this genealogy is repeated in Numbers 26 and in 1 Chronicles, there are substantial variances.

Plus, there are matters of common sense. Joseph was in his early 30's at this time, so Benjamin would have been in his 20's.....a very young man. Yet, we get a listing of 10 sons of Benjamin. And, in Numbers the listing is 5 sons and 2 GRAND-sons! Since the clearly stated timeframe for this chapter is the migration of Israel to Egypt, during the time of the famine, it is utterly impossible for Benjamin to have sired so many children, let alone grandchildren coming from his children, at such a tender age.

Now, if this unnerves you a little, don't let it. Genealogies are inserted into the text for all kinds of reasons in the Bible; and, they have been amended for all kinds of reasons. Not the least of which is that after time has passed, a larger and clearer picture of the family tree was available, and so that additional information was added. Sometimes genealogies were modified because a clan had completely died out, and it is necessary to insert their name to be sure they're not forgotten.

In the case of Genesis 46, it is also possible that the number 70 is symbolic rather than an exact census. 70 is symbolic of the totality of a cycle; it also represents a universality of an event and that something has been divinely ordained. It is very likely that there were WELL more than 70 individuals that went to Egypt because genealogies and censuses generally ONLY count the males of the population. The 66 males mentioned in the genealogy of Genesis 46 are an example of this tradition. There would have been at least as many females born, and probably a few more females than males, which is the normal pattern of birth rate. So, it is likely that the full and complete number that went down into Egypt was closer to 150 family members. But, as would have any small nation of that size, they would also own foreign slaves. In fact, we know from the Scriptures that describe the incident of the slaughter of the residents of Shechem some years earlier (recall, this was revenge by the Israelites for the rape of Jacob's daughter, Dinah by the King of Shechem's son), that Israel took many women and children as slaves and concubines. I would be surprised if their number was any less than 200, and probably a bit more.

Now one more thing about the genealogy and we'll continue: all genealogical listings in the Bible had a method to their madness. The names were grouped in whatever way they were for a specific reason..... it was NEVER at random. And, we see that here in Genesis 46. For the first members of Israel listed are Leah (Jacob's first wife) and her children, and then Leah's servant-girl, Zilpah, and her children. Next is Jacob's second wife, Rachel, along with her children, and that follows with Rachel's servant-girl, Bilah, and Bilah's children.

And, of course, we get further proof of the later redaction of the genealogy when it includes as "among those who went down to Egypt", Joseph's Egyptian-born children, Ephraim and Manasseh; children Jacob would have known nothing about, and children who were born and raised in Egypt..... not in Canaan.

Very probably, verse 28 belongs right after verse 7 in the original. In V28 we are told something that we need to tuck away in our memories: Judah was sent ahead of Jacob to scout out the way. This was a job for the first born; but, of course, we see no mention of Rueben, Jacob's first son. Apparently, Judah had assumed that role, bypassing even 2 more brothers that were normally, by tradition, ahead of him, Simeon and Levi.

Now we see that Jacob and his family arrives for the long-awaited reunion, and Joseph went immediately to the land of Goshen, the place that would be their new home. And, it tells us of the touching scene whereby Joseph, the ruler of the great land of Egypt, humbles himself before his aged father, and then weeps while embracing him.....for a long time.

Joseph then leaves to tell Pharaoh of his family's arrival: this so that the Pharaoh is shown proper respect, and so that he may honor and welcome Israel in whatever way he chooses. Note a little terminology used here that can be confusing: it says in V31 that Joseph went "up" to tell Pharaoh. Well, to us, and really to the rest of the world, even at that time, "up" was "north". But, Joseph most certainly did not go north from the Land of Goshen to Pharaoh, for likely Pharaoh was residing in Memphis, which was a short distance south. The key here is that Egypt was a divided land: and it consisted primarily of two large territories.....one called Upper Egypt, and the other called Lower Egypt. Probably due to the flow direction of the Nile (South to North) Upper Egypt is to the south, and Lower Egypt to the north.....reversed from our traditional thinking. So, even though by all rational and accepted ways of communicating it would seem that one would necessarily have to travel down, south, towards Upper Egypt from Goshen, the terminology used simply expresses the Egyptian viewpoint; you always go UP if you are headed toward Upper Egypt, and DOWN if you are headed towards Lower Egypt.

In any case, as is common for heads of state like Pharaoh, he has been prepared in advance for the greetings and blessings that he will give to his honored guests....Israel....the family of the Vizier of Egypt, Joseph. But, in proper protocol, it is necessary for the Pharaoh himself to pronounce his rulings, face to face with representatives of Israel. So, Joseph also prepares some of his brothers as to what the procedure will be, and tells them exactly what they're to say, so as to accommodate Pharaoh's already decided plan for Israel.....kind of an Egyptian/Hebrew Kabuki dance.

And, in the end, the idea is to make it 100% official, that the land of Goshen is the place that

will be set aside for Israel.

READ GEN 47 all

The ceremony begins, and Joseph begins the pre-planned agenda by formally announcing to the Pharaoh the arrival of his family. And, of course, right on cue, Pharaoh asks their occupation. And, doing their part, the 5 brothers chosen to represent the whole family, respond that they are shepherds and that they have come to request that Pharaoh might let them come to Egypt as the famine is so severe in their homeland, Canaan, that they can no longer survive there.

It is interesting in verse 4 that the term used to describe the stay the Hebrew brothers seek, is to “sojourn”. That is, to stay temporarily. To be guests, not citizens. It is clear that while Jacob knows they’re going to be in Egypt a long time, either he has not revealed this to his sons.....the ones that are currently speaking with Pharaoh..... or, more likely, they choose not to believe such a pessimistic assessment.

In a magnanimous gesture of friendship befitting of royalty, Pharaoh offers the Israelites the land of Goshen. And, further befitting of royalty, Pharaoh does NOT respond to these lowly Hebrew shepherds, he turns to Joseph and gives his reply.

Next, Jacob is presented to Pharaoh. This is a separate meeting from the one the brothers just concluded with Pharaoh. And, it says that Jacob blessed Pharaoh. Now, that might sound a little odd.....for it really kind of reverses their stations in life. It would seem that the humble and simple shepherd like Jacob, a refugee, would have NO business or place blessing such a great man as Pharaoh. But, what this amounted to was the respect that existed in that day for the aged. And, Jacob was probably the most aged man in all Egypt, perhaps the oldest man Pharaoh had ever met. Egyptian records simply don’t show Egyptians living nearly as long as the Hebrews. In fact, Jacob’s elderliness so intrigued Pharaoh that he says to Jacob in V8 “How old ARE you?!” And, Jacob responds that he’s 130 years old, and most of those years have NOT been pleasant. But, then he also tells Pharaoh that 130 years old is nothin’. His ancestors lived to much older ages than he.

So, Jacob and all his clan are settled in the land of Goshen, and there they will remain for the next 4 centuries.

Now we are told that the famine was continuing, even more severe than before, and the Egyptian people, along with foreigners, more and more came to depend on the grain stockpiled by Joseph because the yield of the land became less and less. And, we also see how it came to be that Pharaoh not only gained ownership of all the land of Egypt, but also extended Egypt’s influence into Canaan and the Middle East. For as the people’s food ran out, then their money was exhausted, then their livestock was sold, they next traded their land for food, and eventually sold themselves into the service of the Pharaoh. But, it is key to notice that to the folks giving up their money, land, and liberty, it was JOSEPH the Hebrew they were dealing with.

Of course, the land was rather useless to Pharaoh without somebody to tend the flocks and herds he now owned, and to till the soil. So, Joseph entered the now dispossessed Egyptian people into a tenant/landlord relationship with Pharaoh, as regards the land. That is, the people were allowed to remain on the land they had given up to Joseph and live there, but they had to give a substantial portion of its increase to Pharaoh as rent. This arrangement, which is commonly called serfdom, was closer to enslavement than a business deal. Only the priests of Egypt were exempted from this arrangement, as they were really wards of the state anyway, and it was Egypt's obligation to care for them.

Now, although I mentioned it last week, let's estimate for a moment what Joseph must have been in the eyes of the people of Egypt, and even into parts of Canaan. For, it was Joseph's plan, Joseph's decrees, Joseph's implementations of his own plan that caused the people to become paupers and serfs. It was Joseph's face the people saw confiscating land and livestock. Joseph, while certainly saving their lives during that period of famine, was now their owner: he, as Pharaoh's representative, owned their lands, AND he owned them.

If we want to see the beginning of the hatred of the Egyptians towards the Israelites, and the seminal moment that was the beginning of the steady path towards fulfillment of the prophecy to Abraham of his descendant's enslavement, this must be it. The current Semite Pharaoh, of course, could have cared less what the Egyptian people wanted. But, years later, when the Egyptian people overthrew the hated foreigners, the Hyksos rulers of Egypt, and installed an Egyptian Pharaoh, they were now free to exact retribution for a 100 years of built-up anger and envy towards these Hebrews, led by Joseph who had taken their land and their freedom.

To make matters worse, we see in V27 is that at the same time the Egyptian people were being forced to give up their land in exchange for food to survive, the Israelites were ACQUIRING land in Goshen. And, in that land that they, unlike the Egyptian population, now owned, they prospered and grew dramatically in number.

Now we see that Jacob would live 17 years in Egypt before he died at the age of 147. Jacob, the last patriarch, would be the only one to die on foreign soil. But, before he died, when he knew his time was near, Jacob called Joseph to his side and made him promise not to leave Jacob buried in the sands of Egypt, but that his remains be returned to the Promised Land. Jacob had no need to worry if this promise would be carried out, because before he had arrived in Egypt, God had assured Jacob that this wish would be granted.

Now, Jacob loved God and trusted God; but just exactly HOW God operated (as far as Jacob was concerned) he basically knew from the well-established and common beliefs and traditions of all the Middle Eastern cultures. So, let me remind you of the issue for Jacob that made the location of his burial so critically important to him. This was not some idealistic matter, nor was it about honor. This wasn't even about nationalism, like when a country makes every effort to bring their soldiers who died in battle on foreign soil, home to be interred in their native land. The issue for Jacob involved the all-important matter of ancestor worship. How was he to be buried and gathered to his kin, if his kin (Abraham and Isaac) was in Canaan, but he was in Egypt? The spirits of the dead didn't travel. How was his essence to continue on, after his death, by means of his spirit being tended and honored by his sons, grandsons, great-

grandsons, and so on, if those sons were in Canaan, but his spirit was still in Egypt? If a spirit weren't tended, it would come to an end; that person's essence would evaporate for all time. And, besides, it was the gods of each territory who had rule over their own kingdoms of the dead. So, for Jacob, he wanted to ensure that he indeed would be taken back to Canaan so he could live with his ancestors and his spirit would be properly looked after by his descendants.

But, Jacob had some further duties, as head of the clan, to perform before he passed. He had to transfer the rights he possessed as leader and ruler of the family of Israel along with being the possessor of its wealth, over to the one who would carry on. That is, the first-born rights had to be transferred to the one who would be the next leader of Israel; and along with it, blessings and instructions not only to the next leader of Israel, but to all 12 of his sons. And, what Jacob does next, but hours and days before his death, is quite dramatic and has the most serious, far-reaching, even eternal, consequences for us. I cannot find the words to stress enough that for us to fill with meaning the remainder of the Torah as well as the whole of the Old Testament, we must grasp the significance of the events about to unfold in the last days of Jacob's life. And, after understanding all that, even the New Testament will take on a deeper and fuller meaning to us, as will the rapid unfolding of current events occurring in Israel even as I am speaking to you.

And, those blessings and instructions we will find in the next 3 chapters, which will bring Genesis to a close. Next week we will start looking at those blessings in detail.