

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

Review

Last time, Joseph taunted his brothers one last time by having his silver cup planted in Benjamin’s grain sack before sending them back to Canaan. When the brothers were accused of theft, they rashly promised that whoever was found with the cup would be put to death and the rest of them would become slaves in Egypt. When Joseph offered to keep only Benjamin and let the rest of them go, Judah offered himself in Benjamin’s place.

Joseph Reveals His Identity

As we take up the story now, Joseph was so moved by Judah’s offer to take Benjamin’s punishment himself that he could no longer keep up the charade and revealed his true identity to his brothers.

¹Then Joseph could not control himself before all those who stood by him. He cried, “Make everyone go out from me.” So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. ²And he wept aloud, so that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³And Joseph said to his brothers, “I am Joseph! Is my father still alive?” But his brothers could not answer him, for they were dismayed at his presence.

Genesis 45:1-3 (ESV)

Joseph’s revelation must have shocked his brothers. We can imagine their apprehension about what Joseph might do to them, especially since Benjamin had just been caught with Joseph’s silver cup in his sack. The brothers had been living daily for a decade with the guilt of selling Joseph into slavery. They were certainly fearful that Joseph would now exact his revenge upon them.

⁴So Joseph said to his brothers, “Come near to me, please.” And they came near. And he said, “I am your brother, Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. ⁵And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt. Genesis 45:4-8 (ESV)

Joseph recognized God’s hand in both his travails and his blessings. It’s not entirely clear just when Joseph first came to this realization, but certainly he was already aware when God first rescued him out of the prison and used him to interpret Pharaoh’s dreams. God had also given Joseph insight into His purposes from the time Pharaoh placed him in charge over the Egyptian economy. Joseph knew that the coming famine would affect the entire region, not just Egypt. Therefore, he concluded God’s purpose must be to use him as God’s instrument for preserving his father’s family.

Most likely, Joseph didn’t fully understand that God’s purpose in rescuing Israel out of death in the famine was to later use Israel to bring forth Jesus our LORD who would rescue all humankind out of death in our sins. Nevertheless, throughout his life, Joseph recognized what every Christ follower must if we are to be used effectively by God for his perfect purposes – we must live daily in the certainty of God’s love and righteousness without ever being entirely certain of His plans.

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

Conversely, Joseph’s brothers hadn’t recognized God’s work in their lives at all. They continued to blame themselves for the way they had treated their brother Joseph. In fact, they believed God was punishing them for that when Joseph directed his servants to place their grain money back into their sacks (Genesis 42:28). In this, Joseph’s brothers model our own fleshly response when events don’t transpire as we have expected. Rather than seeking God’s guidance and trusting Him to always be true to His love, we try to make things “right” in our own will and power.

As we shall see later in our study, Joseph’s brothers still doubted Joseph’s intentions until after their father Jacob was dead and buried.

⁹Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, ‘Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me; do not tarry. ¹⁰You shall dwell in the land of Goshen [גֹּשֶׁן gōšēn – drawing near], and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children’s children, and your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹There I will provide for you, for there are yet five years of famine to come, so that you and your household, and all that you have, do not come to poverty.’ ¹²And now your eyes see, and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see, that it is my mouth that speaks to you. ¹³You must tell my father of all my honor in Egypt, and of all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.” ¹⁴Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, and Benjamin wept upon his neck. ¹⁵And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. After that his brothers talked with him. Genesis 45:9-15 (ESV)

Why was Joseph so seemingly urgent in his direction to his brothers that they go up and bring the rest of the family down immediately. We know with the benefit of hindsight that God’s ultimate plan of salvation for all people through Jesus the מָשִׁיחַ *māšīah* depended not only on the survival of Joseph’s brothers, but more importantly the survival of Judah’s son Perez from whose line Jesus’ mother Mary and her husband Joseph would come. Most likely, Joseph had only a vague inkling at best about why the survival of the entire family was essential to God’s plan. Nevertheless, Joseph clearly saw that God was at work and continued in faith and obedience. This is why Joseph emphasized that Jacob was to bring with him all his children and his children’s children.

In Genesis 45:10, we find the first mention of Goshen (גֹּשֶׁן *gōšēn* – drawing near). It is an Egyptian region of the Nile delta, east of the river and west of the Sinai Peninsula. Joseph’s mention in Genesis 45:10 that the family dwelling in Goshen would be near to him was a little word play on the Hebrew meaning of the name Goshen. This place name is not of Egyptian origin, so very likely there had been previous Hebrew settlements in the area. There is an excellent article about the region and its name in the Jewish Encyclopedia.* We’ll explore that topic in more detail when we study Genesis 46.

* Hirsch, Emil G.; Muller, W. (1906) “Goshen”. In Singer, Isidore; et al., eds. The Jewish Encyclopedia. Vol. 6. New York: Funk & Wagnalls. p. 50. (<https://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/6819-goshen>)

¹⁶When the report was heard in Pharaoh’s house, “Joseph’s brothers have come,” it pleased Pharaoh and his servants. ¹⁷And Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Say to your brothers, ‘Do this: load your beasts and go back to the land of

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

Canaan, ¹⁸and take your father and your households, and come to me, and I will give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you shall eat the fat of the land.’ ¹⁹And you, Joseph, are commanded to say, ‘Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰Have no concern for your goods, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.’” ²¹The sons of Israel did so: and Joseph gave them wagons, according to the command of Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. Genesis 45:16-21 (ESV)

There’s nothing to add here except to say that during the famine there must have been precious little of the ‘fat of the land’ of Egypt to be had. Nevertheless, Pharaoh intended to bless Joseph’s family in any way he could.

²²To each and all of them he gave a change of clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels [pieces] of silver and five changes of clothes. ²³To his father he sent as follows: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey. ²⁴Then he sent his brothers away, and as they departed, he said to them, “Do not quarrel on the way.” Genesis 45:22-24 (ESV)

Once more we see the consequences of Jacob’s favoritism of the sons of Rachel over his other sons, this time exhibited by Joseph himself. Maybe, Joseph suspected that his favoritism of Benjamin would cause jealousy and therefore warned them not to quarrel along the way.

ASIDE – Once again (as in Genesis 37:28), we find the ESV inserting the word shekel into Genesis 45:22 even though the word שֶׁקֶל *šeqel* doesn’t appear in the Hebrew text. Some other English translations render the phrase שְׁלֹשׁ מֵאוֹת כֶּסֶף (*three hundred of silver*) as three hundred *pieces* of silver. Humorously, Young’s Literal Translation speaks of three hundred *silverlings*, whatever a silverling is.

²⁵So they went up out of Egypt and came to the land of Canaan to their father Jacob. ²⁶And they told him, “Joseph is still alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt.” And his heart became numb, for he did not believe them. ²⁷But when they told him all the words of Joseph, which he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸And Israel [יִשְׂרָאֵל yisrā’el – God prevails] said, “It is enough; Joseph my son is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.” Genesis 45:25-28 (ESV)

It’s not entirely clear what Jacob meant in saying “*It is enough*;...” in Genesis 45:28. Perhaps he meant that Joseph’s words which he had told his brothers to repeat to their father were enough to convince Jacob that Joseph was still alive. Regardless of that, Jacob resolved to make the journey to Egypt despite his advanced age.

Before we continue, notice the juxtaposition of Jacob’s/Israel’s names in Genesis 45:27-28. Perhaps we shouldn’t read too much into this, but of course these two names are symbolic of Jacob’s original fleshly nature and Israel’s spiritual transformation into the man who finally allowed God to prevail over his life. The remainder of the Biblical narrative extends this trend – sometimes calling Jacob/Israel by his original name and sometimes by the new name God gave him at Peniel. In this,

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

God’s Word symbolizes the concept that our salvation isn’t a “one and done” even though our eternal life in Christ is certainly assured by His finished work on the cross. Nevertheless, our perfection into the very image of Christ is a continuing process empowered by the Holy Spirit of God dwelling in the heart of the believer.

¹So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ²And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.” And he said, “Here I am.” ³Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father [האל אלהי אביך 'el 'ēlōhîm 'āh] . Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph’s hand shall close your eyes.” Genesis 46:1-4 (ESV)

Here in Genesis 46:1 we find the last reference to sacrificial offerings made in worship of God until after the Israelites crossed over the Red Sea after leaving Egypt over four centuries later. God fulfilled His promise made to Israel here in Genesis 46:4 when He parted the Red Sea allowing the Israelites to escape from Pharaoh’s pursuing armies (Exodus 14).

Notice that God Himself called Jacob by his original name in Genesis 46:2! This is validation of the idea that Jacob’s transformation into Israel was a protracted process that continued for many years after God began it by renaming Jacob as Israel. It is worth repeating that this same process of sanctification continues in the hearts of all Christians throughout our lives from the time we first believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and confess His lordship over our lives until God calls us at last to Himself where we will live with Him forever having been perfected into the image of Jesus.

Before we move on, notice the phrase **האל אלהי אביך 'el 'ēlōhîm 'āh** in Genesis 46:3. This is another instance of the uncommon use of the singular form of the Hebrew word for God **האל 'el**. We have seen it before in such phrases as “LORD God” and “God almighty” (e.g Genesis 17:1).

⁵Then Jacob set out from Beersheba. The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷his sons, and his sons’ sons with him, his daughters, and his sons’ daughters. All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. Genesis 46:5-7 (ESV)

The family’s abandonment of Canaan was complete. The cave of Machpelah which Abraham purchased as a burial place for his family was the only possession of the Israelites left behind. This has symbolic significance. Throughout God’s Word, Egypt symbolizes the world and worldly living while Canaan represents Heaven and godly living. As they departed from Canaan, the Israelites were setting out on a sojourn away from the worship of God into a life of worldly toil that lasted over 400 years. Nevertheless, God remained faithful to His promise made to Jacob at Beersheba that one day He would redeem His people out of Egypt. Of course, God perfected that redemption for all humankind through Jesus’ birth, death, and resurrection.

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

For completeness’ sake, here are the lists of all the Israelites who left Canaan to sojourn in Egypt.

Family of Leah

⁸Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons. Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn, ⁹and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹²The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron. ¹⁴The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. ¹⁵These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three. Genesis 46:8-15 (ESV)

Family of Zilpah

¹⁶The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. ¹⁸These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter; and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons. Genesis 46:16-18 (ESV)

Family of Rachel

¹⁹The sons of Rachel, Jacob’s wife: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him. ²¹And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²²These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all. Genesis 46:19-22 (ESV)

Family of Bilhah

²³The son of Dan: Hushim. ²⁴The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all. Genesis 46:23-25 (ESV)

²⁶All the persons [נַפְשׁוֹ nepeš - persons] belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants, not including Jacob’s sons’ wives, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷And the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two. All the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy. Genesis 46:26-27 (ESV)

Twice in this passage we find the Hebrew נַפְשׁוֹ **nepeš**. This word means soul, self, life, creature, person, mind, or living being. Yet no women are counted in the preceding lists of names except Jacob’s only named daughter Dinah, Asher’s daughter Serah, and Joseph’s Egyptian wife Asenath. Apart from Dinah, we have no Biblical indication of any daughters born to Jacob by Leah, Rachel, Zilpah, and Bilhah, but presumably there must have been some. The only women mentioned (but not

Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

named) in the party that journeyed to Egypt are the wives of Jacob’s sons. So, there were at least thirteen women in the party. However, it’s safe to assume that the entire family of Jacob that God would use to build the nation of Israel was about half men and half women for a grand total of about 130-150 **נֶפֶשׁ** **nepeš** – persons.

28He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen. 29Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen. He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while. 30Israel said to Joseph, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive.” Genesis 46:28-30 (ESV)

Look at the Lower Egypt map.



Lower Egypt

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Genesis 45:1-46:30 – Jacob’s Family Reunited

Once again, we find Judah taking the lead. Jacob’s family most likely crossed the Shur Desert to the south on the road from Beersheba to Succoth but may have come along the shore of the Mediterranean. Jacob sent Judah ahead to tell Joseph the family was about to arrive. Then Joseph rode in his chariot and probably met the family at Succoth.

Looking Ahead

Notice that Goshen lies well to the east of the center of the Nile delta. The delta is of course very fertile agricultural land nourished by the annual Nile floods. However, the floods don’t always reach all the way into Goshen. Consequently, Goshen was not well suited to agriculture and only sparsely settled by the Egyptians. Although Goshen wasn’t fertile enough to support raising crops, it was well suited to herding. The Egyptians used Goshen to pasture their cattle, and Israel would use it to raise their sheep and goats as we’ll see next time.