

Text: Genesis 46:1–47:31

Title: Israel moves to Egypt

Truth: God used an unexpected place and people to save His people.

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Introduction

After the revelation of Joseph to his brothers and the communication of this information to Jacob back in the land of Canaan, there is quite a bit of time until the deaths of Jacob and his son Joseph. This last section of Genesis covers that history and prepares us for the book of Exodus—events of a few hundred years later.

As I considered what happened to the land of Egypt during the famine, I came upon this source: “Land ownership in ancient Egypt cycled between private, monarchical, and feudal. A strong king could take advantage of harsh situations such as famine, buy lands from private owners and make them a property of the crown. A weaker king would have to buy services from strong lords by giving them gifts of land.”¹ The strong king option is effectively what happened under Joseph’s rule (47:20), although we should not consider what he did to be the actions of an evil dictator. He was a benevolent ruler over the nation of Egypt.

I. Jacob Moves from Canaan to Goshen, Genesis 46

- A. He started out perfectly—by stopping to offer sacrifices to God. It should be the same for you—stop before you start—to thank God, ask His guidance, and entrust yourself to Him.
- B. God revealed to Jacob that it was OK for him to go down to Egypt. *This* journey down to Egypt was approved by God (see 26:2, 12:10) because God had ordained the nation to grow large there in fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant. He also planned that they would suffer bondage and be delivered by Moses. God would use these negative experiences to mold the nation into one that would have compassion on strangers, not one that would hate foreigners (Exodus 22:21, 23:9; Lev. 19:34; Deut. 10:19).

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_reform_in_ancient_Egypt

Other times, going to Egypt was not right because it was out of fear, not faith (Jer. 42:19). This time, it was part of God's plan, to go down to Egypt with the baby nation and cause it to grow into a mighty group of people. Jacob started out with 70 people (see the appendix for details on this starting point) and about 400 years later they returned to Canaan.

A fast population growth rate is 3%, so if we did some math... $70 * 1.03^{400}$ years = over 9 million souls. A more modest growth rate of 2% would result in $70 * 1.02^{400} = 192,000$ people. Estimates of the Jewish population that departed Egypt in Exodus indicate a growth rate between 2 to 3% annually, which is doable, especially if the people are fertile and blessed by God as indicated in Exodus 1:7.

- C. God promised Jacob that "Joseph will put his hand on your eyes." This is a prophecy that Jacob would die in old age and Joseph would "close his eyes" at his death. He would be in the presence of Joseph, the son he thought he had lost decades earlier.
- D. The next verses, from 5-27 explain that Jacob and the family went down to Egypt using the carts which Pharaoh had sent for that purpose. The 66 other people who ended up in Egypt are listed. See the appendix at the bottom of these notes for a tabular representation of the information in these verses.
- E. Jacob's reunion with Joseph. Joseph meets his dad again in verse 29 and they savor the moment for a while. Joseph goes to report this happy occasion to Pharaoh and prepares him for what his brothers are going to say when they are interviewed.
- F. Verses 28-34 explain how Israel's family moved to the location called Goshen inside of Egypt. More importantly, Joseph also prepared his brothers for their interview with Pharaoh, so that Pharaoh would look favorably on them and give them the land of Goshen, which was suitable for their livestock. I notice the political wisdom of Joseph in dealing with the king. Their answer to Pharaoh about their occupation—shepherding—would confirm that Pharaoh would want them in Goshen. This was good land for grazing sheep, and apparently it was away from the primary dwelling places of the Egyptians in the region. This was helpful

because they did not like shepherds, nor did they like eating with Hebrews.

- G. While they were blessed to have a new home, the dislike of their new neighbors toward them is not an auspicious welcome to their new residence! However, this meant that Israel's offspring would be able to keep to themselves religiously and ethnically separated from the Egyptians and their idolatry.

II. Chronology of Genesis

- A. Jacob went down to Egypt at the age of 130 (47:9) and died at the age of 147 (47:28). This means that there were 17 years from chapter 45 to chapter 49, which included five more years of famine and 12 other years. Joseph was 110 years old when he died (50:26) and he went to Egypt at age 17 and stood before Pharaoh in prominence starting at age 30 (37:2, 41:46). So, he served in an official capacity for about 80 years (110 – 30). Wow!

During that time, Joseph survived more than one Pharaoh. He called himself a “father to Pharaoh,” indicating that the first Pharaoh had died sometime during the seven years of plenty, and a new younger Pharaoh was over the land. With 80 years of service to Egypt, he was probably a counselor to several Pharaohs and older than all but the first one.

- B. We can compute some more chronological information. Since Joseph was 30 when he stood before Pharaoh, and there were 7 years of plenty and 2 years of famine by the time that Jacob came down to Egypt at age 130, this means that Jacob had baby Joseph when he was about 91 years of age. Since this was at the end of 14 years of Jacob's service to Laban (30:25), Jacob was 77 when he went to serve Laban. So then at their reunion in Egypt, Jacob was 130 and Joseph 39. 17 years later, when Jacob died at 147, Joseph would have been 56. It would have been 54 years later that Joseph died at age 110. So:

1. Genesis 46–50 covers a period of $54 + 17$ (years Jacob lived in Egypt) = **71** years.
2. Genesis 37–45 covers a period of 39 (age of Joseph) – 17 (years Joseph lived before being sold) = **22** years.

3. Genesis 28–37 covers a period of 14 (first years of Jacob’s service to Laban) + 17 (Joseph teenaged length of life so far) = **31** years. Of the 17 in this computation, 6 of those were in Jacob’s last segment of serving Laban when his flocks grew large (he served him a total of 20 years, 31:38). The remaining 11 occurred after he left Laban, was reunited with Esau, and settled in the land of Canaan.
4. Genesis 25-27 spans the first **77** years of Jacob’s life. We calculated this in the notes on Genesis 27 as his age when he deceived his dad. His birth is recorded in chapter 25.
5. Genesis 23-25 covers a period of 60 (Isaac’s age when Jacob and Esau were born) – 37 (Isaac’s age when his mom Sarah died) = **23** years.

The 37 comes from the fact that Sarah died at 127 and bore Isaac when she was 90, so this was Isaac’s age when she died in chapter 23. The 60 is Isaac’s age when his twins were born (25:26).

6. Genesis 17-23 cover a period of 127 (Sarah’s age at death) – 90 (Sarah’s age at Isaac’s birth) = **37** years.
7. Genesis 12-16 cover a period of 100 (Abraham’s age at birth of Isaac) – 75 (age when Abraham went to Canaan) = **25** years.
8. The first 11 chapters of Genesis cover at least a couple thousand years. The last 39 chapters account for about 286 years (sum of the above calculations). This number can also be arrived at by adding 25 + 60 + 147 + 54 (Isaac born when Abraham was 100 less the 75 when he arrived in Canaan; 60 years until the birth of Jacob; Jacob lived 147 years; Joseph lived 54 years beyond that).

III. The Five Additional Years of Famine, Genesis 47

- A. Shortly after coming down to Egypt, Jacob and his family are presented before Pharaoh, who agrees to give them a choice piece of property in his land to sustain their livelihood. Beyond that, he offers that if there are any competent men among the brothers, he has a job for them tending his livestock. He had already seen that whatever is in Joseph’s hand has prospered, and so he probably

figured that if he gave Joseph's brothers some responsibilities, they would prosper as well.

- B. Pharaoh spoke with Jacob in 47:7-10. Of human interest is how the young pharaoh asked Jacob his age—obviously he was advanced in years and the young man was interested in that fact.

Notice that Jacob blessed Pharaoh! Consider this in light of the truth taught in Hebrews 7:7. But also consider it in light of the fact that Jacob was saved and believed in the God of Israel and so had a real blessing to offer, unlike Pharaoh who was not a believer in the God of Israel. Not incidentally, Jacob was 130 years old, and Pharaoh was probably a young man. Here is a blessing from elder to younger.

- C. The famine continued for five more years, and the Egyptian people ran out of money with which to buy grain. One wonders why they might not have saved some grain for themselves during the years of plenty. Perhaps they did not believe a famine was coming? Perhaps the 20% taxation did not help? In any case, they had to exhaust their money, then sell their livestock, then turn over their land, and then give up themselves, to continue to buy food. As a result, all the land in Egypt became "government owned." The only exception was the land of the priests, who owned their property by title from Pharaoh (an early religious tax exemption). Then Joseph helped the people by giving them seed to sow their fields. They owed 20% of the return to the government as a tax and could keep the rest for themselves.

To "ration" a scarce resource, some kind of financial transaction needs to be made. But the moral difficulty with the method used by Joseph is that he was selling back to the people what he took from them in the beginning. An argument can be made that he should have *given* it to them freely because it came from them, and perhaps in a proportional way as to what was taken from them during the first 7 years, so that if *they* had extra, they could sell it. Such is a difficulty of any wealth-redistribution program. Perhaps Joseph's hands were tied for some reason.

- D. By this point, Jacob is getting nearer to the end of his life, so he makes some funeral plans by having Joseph promise that he would

not be buried in Egypt, but rather in the burial plot that Abraham had purchased (Genesis 23). He used the same “hand under the thigh” ritual for making a promise that Abraham used with his servant Eleazar in Genesis 24:2.

Conclusion

This is the story of the salvation of a large clan—not *spiritual salvation* but *physical rescue*. Remember: the famine was a real danger. We are told by statisticians that 3 million children die annually from malnutrition—a lack of essential nutrients. Other say that one person dies of essentially starvation every 4 seconds, with as many as 20,000 in the United States. How that can be boggles my mind. But in world history, it is even worse. Millions in Ukraine died in 1932-33 in a man-made famine under the hand of Stalin. The Great Chinese Famine in 1959-61 (also mostly man-made) cost the lives of somewhere between 15 to 55 million people.

The situation for Israel is ironic because they left the *promised land*. At this time, it was *not* flowing with milk and honey—and neither was Egypt—because of the famine. They traveled instead to the land which the Israelites would later call the land of fish, cucumbers, melons, leeks, onions, and garlic (Num. 11:5). Their return, corporately speaking, to the milk and honey land was set by God for four centuries in the future.

We may tend to focus on Joseph in chapters 37 -50, but God does something strange but wonderful for the entire clan of Joseph. It is strange that they would end up in Egypt. But wonderful that God saved them using the benevolence of a powerful nation nearby. Sometimes God will take you too on a path you did not anticipate. He may direct you on a path or rescue you by a way you would never expect. And God uses all kinds of people to bless His children, even unbelieving ones like Pharaoh.

MAP

Israel's Family who went to Egypt, 46:8-27

Jacob (L = Leah, Z = Zilpah, R = Rachel, B = Bilhah)

L:Reuben	L:Simeon	L:Levi	L:Judah
Hanoch Pallu Hezron Carmi	Jemuel Jamin Ohad Jachin Zohar Shaul	Gershon Kohath Merari	Er (died) Onan (died) Shelah Perez (Hezron, Hamul) Zerah

L:Issachar	L:Zebulun	L:Dinah (33)	Z:Gad
Tola Puvah Job Shimron	Sered Elon Jahleel		Ziphion Haggi Shuni Ezbon Eri Arodi Areli

Z:Asher (16)	R:Joseph	R:Benjamin (14)	B:Dan
Jimnah Ishuah Isui Beriah (Heber, Malchiel) Serah	Manasseh Ephraim	Belah Becher Ashbel Gera Naaman Ehi Rosh Muppim Huppim Ard	Hushim

B:Naphtali (7)		
Jahzeel Guni Jezer Shillem	Total = 70, plus Jacob's son's wives	Verse 26 has Jacob + 66 + Joseph + 2 of Joseph's sons