

Comments on Genesis 46

The Lord confirms the original covenant made with Abraham, regarding a promised land and great posterity, and sends his grandson Jacob to Egypt where they will survive the drought.

Israel temporarily leaving the land of Canaan doesn't negate the covenant when the Lord tells them they can leave. Abraham similarly left Canaan for Egypt during a famine as well (cf. 12:10). The Lord tells Jacob they will return to Canaan in the future as a great nation, fulfilling the original promise to Abraham.

¹ And Israel took his journey with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices unto the God of his father Isaac.

² And God spake unto Israel in the visions of the night, and said, Jacob, Jacob. And he said, Here am I. ³ And he said, I am God, the God of thy father: fear not to go down into Egypt; for I will there make of thee a great nation: ⁴ I will go down with thee into Egypt; and I will also surely bring thee up again: and Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes.

⁵ And Jacob rose up from Beersheba: and the sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, and their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ And they took their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan, and came into Egypt, Jacob, and all his seed with him: ⁷ His sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters, and all his seed brought he with him into Egypt.

v1-7 Israel collects his family and starts traveling to Egypt, going as far as Beersheba. There, Israel stops to offer sacrifice to the Lord (v. 1). The Lord speaks to Israel by night vision (v. 2). The Lord tells Israel he can go down to Egypt and his family will become a large nation (v. 3). The Lord will watch over him in Egypt, and bring him up again from Egypt, although in death, as Joseph will permanently close his eyes (v. 4).

Jacob believes the Lord's revelation and his entire family departs on the trek to Egypt (v. 5), taking all of their property (v. 6), and family (v. 7).

The text suggests Jacob is hesitant to leave Canaan, given the connection the land has to the covenant with the God of Israel. The Lord tells Jacob to go to Egypt, which He formerly told his father, Isaac, not to do (cf. 26:1-2), but before that told Abraham to do (cf. 12:10).

The underlying issue is Jacob is living in the land promised to his grandfather Abraham, and is now leaving to go to another land. Should Abraham's grandson really leave the promised land and take all of Abraham's descendants out of that promised land? The Lord tells him, "Yes". While the Lord has this all planned out (cf. 15:13-14), Jacob obviously isn't as clear on the details, so he is wanting confirmation.

v1 "Beersheba", the dwelling place of Abraham (cf. 22:19), and Isaac also (cf. 26:23-25), while Jacob was in his youth (cf. 28:10). Jacob would see this as his ancestral land, and leaving the ancestral land and offering sacrifice to the Lord there before leaving would be his way of communicating with the Lord that he was not forgetting Him. If Jacob were willing to abandon the Lord and go to Egypt to worship their gods, then he would not have sacrificed to the Lord. Instead, he does sacrifice to the Lord, in his ancestral home, to show Him that he takes the covenant made with his grandfather seriously.

Jacob was also near Beersheba when he had his first theophany (cf. 28:10-22), and this is Jacob's final documented theophany. The Lord is not heard from again until He speaks to Moses.

"the God of his father Isaac", likely meaning to invoke the context of 28:23-25.

v2 "Jacob, Jacob", an emphatic double repeat when being called by the Lord identifies a prominent revelation, cp. Abraham in 22:11, and Moses in Exod. 3:4. Note Isaac is not addressed in this fashion.

v3 "I will there make of thee a great nation", the Lord reiterates the promise made in 35:11-12, which is echoing the statements made to Abraham (cf. 12:2, 15:14, 17:4-6, 18:18, 22:18) and Isaac (cf. 25:23, 26:4, but note the first reference is to Rebekah and the second statement to Isaac explicitly references the promise to Abraham not Isaac). Jacob is the last of the patriarchs because after him there is a literal multitude of people in the family, no longer a single person to address.

v4 Just as the Lord engineered events to bring Israel into Egypt (cf. 45:4-8), so will He bring Israel out of Egypt (cf. Exod. 6:1-13).

"Joseph shall put his hand upon thine eyes", the assertion the Lord makes that Joseph will close his eyes is the Lord telling Jacob he will not die on the journey to Egypt, but will survive the journey and meet with his missing son Joseph and then die in peace, having reunited with Joseph. If Jacob had concerns about not surviving the journey to Egypt, for whatever reason, that is no longer a concern, as the Lord has told him that He will take him there to see Joseph.

v5 "sons of Israel carried Jacob their father", Jacob is elderly and infirm, apparently not capable of making the trip on his own feet. His sons are, so they lead the caravan while all of the women, children, and elderly ride on the wagons with their stuff.

v6 Since the family was semi-nomadic shepherds, it would have been relatively easy for them to pack everything up and move.

v7 This verse provides a clear transition into the subsequent genealogy of v. 8-27. Notable is the identification of Jacob's "daughters" in the plural. The only daughter we have heard of in the preceding text was Dinah (cf. ch. 34), who is included in the genealogy in v. 15, but there must have been more daughters than just her.

⁸ And these are the names of the children of Israel, which came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons:

Reuben, Jacob's firstborn. ⁹ And the sons of Reuben; Hanoch, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi.

¹⁰ And the sons of Simeon; Jemuel, and Jamin, and Ohad, and Jachin, and Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanitish woman.

¹¹ And the sons of Levi; Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.

¹² And the sons of Judah; Er, and Onan, and Shelah, and Pharez, and Zarah: but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan. And the sons of Pharez were Hezron and Hamul.

¹³ And the sons of Issachar; Tola, and Phuvah, and Job, and Shimron.

¹⁴ And the sons of Zebulun; Sered, and Elon, and Jahleel.

¹⁵ These be the sons of Leah, which she bare unto Jacob in Padanaram, with his daughter Dinah: all the souls of his sons and his daughters were thirty and three.

¹⁶ And the sons of Gad; Ziphion, and Haggi, Shuni, and Ezbon, Eri, and Arodi, and Areli.

¹⁷ And the sons of Asher; Jimnah, and Ishuah, and Isui, and Beriah, and Serah their sister: and the sons of Beriah; Heber, and Malchiel.

¹⁸ These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter, and these she bare unto Jacob, even sixteen souls.

¹⁹ The sons of Rachel Jacob's wife; Joseph, and Benjamin.

²⁰ And unto Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, which Asenath the daughter of Potipherah priest of On bare unto him.

²¹ And the sons of Benjamin were Belah, and Becher, and Ashbel, Gera, and Naaman, Ehi, and Rosh, Muppim, and Huppim, and Ard.

²² These are the sons of Rachel, which were born to Jacob: all the souls were fourteen.

²³ And the sons of Dan; Hushim.

²⁴ And the sons of Naphtali; Jahzeel, and Guni, and Jezer, and Shillem.

²⁵ These are the sons of Bilhah, which Laban gave unto Rachel his daughter, and she bare these unto Jacob: all the souls were seven.

²⁶ All the souls that came with Jacob into Egypt, which came out of his loins, besides Jacob's sons' wives, all the souls were threescore and six; ²⁷ And the sons of Joseph, which were born him in Egypt, were two souls: all the souls of the house of Jacob, which came into Egypt, were threescore and ten.

v8-27 A genealogy of Israel's family, sorted by mother, is given, with all sons and grandsons, totaling seventy. Abraham's family has already expanded to seventy sons, plus daughters and daughters in law.

Noteworthy in this genealogy is that it is largely attested to in the text, meaning there are no significant contradictions or discrepancies internal to the text of Genesis account. This is in contrast to the genealogy of Esau (cf. 36:10-43). As Jacob's descendants are the ones writing the document, they have more details and insights into the events and therefore can provide a more accurate documentary account. In the case of Ishamel's family, there is a very brief genealogy provided (cf. 25:12-18) in fulfilment of the Lord's promise there will be twelve princes (cf. 17:20).

Also noteworthy is of the four mothers, only Rachel is identified as "Jacob's wife" (v. 19). Bilhah and Zilpah are understandable, as they are concubines, but, clearly, Leah never rose to be Rachel's equal.

v8 "And these are the names...", this is how the Book of Exodus starts, picking up from the present genealogy.

v27 "threescore and ten", or, in other words, seventy. This is the original source of the number 70 in scriptural usage and all subsequent uses are references of this. The number is meant to represent divinely ordered perfection, 7 times 10.

²⁸ And he sent Judah before him unto Joseph, to direct his face unto Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen. ²⁹ And Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet Israel his father, to Goshen, and presented himself unto him; and he fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while. ³⁰ And Israel said unto Joseph, Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, because thou art yet alive.

³¹ And Joseph said unto his brethren, and unto his father's house, I will go up, and shew Pharaoh, and say unto him, My brethren, and my father's house, which were in the land of Canaan, are come unto me; ³² And the men are shepherds, for their trade hath been to feed cattle; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have. ³³ And it shall come to pass, when Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, what is your occupation? ³⁴ That ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth even until now, both we, and also our fathers: that ye may dwell in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians.

v28-34 As they are traveling, Jacob sends Judah ahead of them to Goshen (v. 28). Joseph takes his chariot and travels to meet his father, Jacob. When they meet, Joseph is overwhelmed by emotion (v. 29). Jacob tells Joseph that he can now die happy, because he has seen Joseph alive (v. 30).

Joseph tells his brothers that he will go to Pharaoh and tell him that his family has arrived (v. 31). Joseph will tell Pharaoh that they keep livestock, including sheep (v. 32). Joseph then instructs his brothers to tell Pharaoh (v. 33) that they keep livestock, so they will be put into the land of Goshen. They should omit anything about being shepherds, because the Egyptians hate sheep and shepherds (v. 34).

v34 "every shepherd is an abomination unto the Egyptians", Speiser (Anchor Bible Commentary on Genesis, 1964, page 345) suggests the Egyptian rejection of shepherding is a result of cultural connections to the [Hyksos](#). Alter (Five Books of Moses, 2004, page 270) suggests the rejection has to do with Egyptian economy being agriculturally based on irrigation from the Nile, so grazing livestock in a nomadic fashion was not a significant part of their economy. We see in the next chapter (cf. 47:6) that Pharaoh keeps herds, though not necessarily sheep, so maintaining livestock is not entirely anathema to the Egyptians.

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