

## **A Great Quandary**

Genesis 46:1-34

Jacob must have been in a great quandary. Such great uncertainty. Seemingly unsolvable perplexity. He must have been nearly completely overwhelmed by the decision that was before him. Should he or should he not go down to Egypt?

It certainly seemed that the providential guidance of his circumstances meant that God was leading him to Egypt, but how could he know for sure. God had not explicitly told him to go, not yet. He only knew that Joseph was alive and prosperous in Egypt, and that he himself was facing imminent impoverishment and probable death if he remained in the famine-stricken land of Canaan.

But how could he leave Canaan? After all, that was the promised land! That was the land to which God had brought Abraham, the land which he promised him, for him and his seed. And until now, each time he had made an important move, God had spoken to him directly. Naturally, therefore, he was reluctant to make such a drastic move as this without direct confirmation from God that he should do so. After all, God was quite able to break the famine and supply their needs right there in Canaan, if it was his will to do so. He had often provided miraculously before. \

So what should he do? He started out for Egypt, but very slowly. And at the first opportunity, at the familiar place of Beersheba, he offered sacrifices upon the altar in worship to God.

v.1

It was at Beersheba that Abraham and Abimelech had first made a covenant. It was there that Isaac built an altar and called

upon the name of the Lord. And it would be there at Beersheba that God would again speak to Jacob, for the eighth and final recorded time.

v.2

There, at Beersheba, God set his mind at ease about going down to Egypt. And this is a useful reminder to us that,

### **I. GOD GIVES HIS PEOPLE CONTINUOUS, REPETITIVE ENCOURAGEMENT.**

And it is such an encouraging message for Jacob.

v.3-4

Continuous, repetitive encouragement. Do you know why God gives us that? Because we need it! We all need encouragement. And we need it often. Repeatedly. Continuously.

There isn't much new in this promise made to Jacob. Little that God hasn't already revealed. Really nothing that Jacob can't figure out for himself, except perhaps the specific promise of verse 4 that "Joseph will put his hand on your eyes." That is a reference to Jacob's death. The final act of honoring one who has died, the act of burial itself, is described by those words. Joseph himself, the beloved son, would preside over Jacob's funeral.

But the main thrust of the encouragement of verses 3-4 is a repetition of the covenant promises which God has already made. And so the great encouragement for Jacob, and for us, is that,

#### **A. God remains faithful to his covenant promises.**

God identifies himself first of all as the God of the covenant.

v.3a "I am God, the God of your Father."

It is the Hebrew name El, the strong one, the creator and sovereign of all men. Actually, there is the added emphasis of an article, in English, The God, the strong one. And he calls himself “the strong one” because of his ability to help and protect Jacob in this move to Egypt.

I am the God of your father, obviously the God of Abraham and Isaac. And the message is, “Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt.” Do not be afraid. How often does God say that to his people?

Gen. 15:1 “After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your exceedingly great reward.”

The same encouragement was given to Isaac.

Gen. 26:23 Then he went up from there to Beersheba. 24 And the LORD appeared to him the same night and said, “I am the God of your father Abraham; do not fear, for I am with you. I will bless you and multiply your descendants for My servant Abraham’s sake.”

We hear those words frequently from Moses, giving God’s encouragement to the people of Israel.

Deut.31:6 “Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the LORD your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.” 7 Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. 8 And the LORD, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”

And to Joshua, we read this encouragement,

Josh. 1:6 “Be strong and of good courage, for to this people you shall divide as an inheritance the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. 7 Only be strong and very courageous, that you may observe to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may prosper wherever you go. 8 This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. 9 Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

And we have the same words from Jesus’ own lips.

John 14:27 “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”

And it was the encouragement given to the Apostle John as he received that great vision of the glory of Christ.

Rev. 1:12 Then I turned to see the voice that spoke with me. And having turned I saw seven golden lampstands, 13 and in the midst of the seven lampstands One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. 14 His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; 15 His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; 16 He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength. 17 And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, “Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. 18 I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”

From the beginning to the end of the Bible, God says to his people, “Do not be afraid. I am with you.” That’s the covenant. That’s his covenant promise. And how precious is that promise. So he tells Jacob, “Do not fear to go down to Egypt.” And then he repeats the specific covenant promise. “I will make of you a great nation there.”

Now, there is something new in that, something added. The word “there.” The covenant promise was that God would make the family of Jacob into the nation of Israel, a great and mighty nation. But now we’re told, that nation will become great in Egypt! And Jacob need not fear, for God promises,

v.4a “I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also surely bring you up again.”

The promise of the deliverance, which we saw last week, Gen. 45:7 “And God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.”

God will keep his covenant promises, and that remains a great encouragement for us today. So, do not be afraid! That sounds so simple, doesn’t it? So easy. But surely, it’s easier said than done. But there is only one way that you will be able not to be afraid, and that is to understand God’s own sovereign power. When God says, “I am God, the God of your father, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” he then says, “Therefore, do not be afraid.

Evidently, the people weren’t. At least, they weren’t paralyzed by their fear. The way to overcome fear is to trust God and walk by faith. And the great encouragement of this example is that,

## **B. God protects his people as they walk by faith.**

God protects his people. The family of Jacob got up and headed down to Egypt. And guess what happened? They made it!

v.5-7

They all made it. With all their children. With all their wives. With all their livestock. With all their possessions. They made it. They walked by faith, in obedience to God’s command. And they were protected.

A couple other related verses for your encouragement this morning,

Hebr. 13:5 “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” 6 So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?”

And, Ps. 27:1 “The LORD is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The LORD is the strength of my life; Of whom shall I be afraid?”

God gives his people continuous, repetitive encouragement. Because we need it. And the story continues, so to speak. Once in Egypt, we see that,

## **II. GOD MAKES HIS PEOPLE INTO A GREAT NATION.**

Verses 8 through 27 are a listing of the family tree, beginning with Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob. His sons are mentioned. Then Simeon. Levi. Judah. Perez. Issachar. Zebulun. Gad. Asher. Joseph and Benjamin. Dan and Naphtali.

Why such detail? Because the twelve sons represented what would become the whole nation of Israel. The twelve were the full number of those whom God had chosen to be his children. And so what we have in this genealogy is,

#### **A. The fulness of the twelve sons.**

The fulness of God's chosen people. The twelve. The twelve tribes of Israel are all of God's chosen people.

The NT, of course, continues that use of the number twelve as the fulness of God's people, for their were twelve apostles, who formed the foundation of the church. And those apostles have a direct connection with the tribes of Israel.

Matt. 19:8 So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

James greets the church of Jesus Christ in his letter with these words,

James 1:1 "James, a bondservant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, To the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad: Greetings."

In the symbolic language of Revelation, that emphasis upon the fulness of the twelve continues.

Rev.7:4 "And I heard the number of those who were sealed. One hundred and forty-four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel were sealed: 5 of the tribe of Judah twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Reuben twelve thousand were sealed; of the tribe of Gad twelve thousand were sealed."

All twelve tribes specified! And of course, that fulness of twelve continues with the revelation of the New Jerusalem, in,

Rev. 21:10 "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, 11 having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. 12 Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: 13 three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. 14 Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb."

And finally,

Rev. 22:1 "And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. 2 In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. 3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him. 4 They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads."

God makes his people into a great nation. In the OT, that nation consisted of the twelve tribes of Israel, the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob. In the NT, those twelve tribes become the twelve apostles, who were the foundation of the church of God's people from every nation. And so the OT promise of a great nation will be finally and completely fulfilled only when Jesus Christ returns in glory and the New Jerusalem ushered in for all eternity.

And what a great nation that will be!

There is another significant number here. The number 70.  
v.26-27

There we have,

**B. The fulness of the seventy family members.**

You have to work hard at figuring out exactly who the seventy are here, though. Counting up all the numbers, you get 70, but Jacob himself isn't listed. So, if you add Jacob, and add Dinah, who is specifically mentioned, and subtract Er and Onan, who both died in Canaan, you realize that there were 70 members in Jacob's family.

Of those 70, Joseph and his two sons were already in Egypt. So 66 went Jacob on this journey, which is what we read in verse 26.

Acts 7:14 creates an added problem, however, by offering the total of 75.

Acts 7:14 "Then Joseph sent and called his father Jacob and all his relatives to him, seventy-five people."

It would seem that Luke, in writing Acts, is quoting from the Greek translation of the OT, an uninspired translation that used the number 75 instead of 70, including perhaps five grandsons of Joseph in the list. There were actually, literally, more than 70 people. But 70 is used accurately as the measure of Jacob's immediate family.

For our study of Genesis, the number 70 is of great significance, a number reached by multiplying 7 by 10. Seven is a number marking a divine covenant work and ten is the number of completeness. So 70 signifies that at this point God has done a complete divine work upon Israel and had made them into a great nation. And so we read in,

Deut.11:20 "You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall

serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name. 21 He is your praise, and He is your God, who has done for you these great and awesome things which your eyes have seen. 22 Your fathers went down to Egypt with seventy persons, and now the LORD your God has made you as the stars of heaven in multitude."

So it is that God has made his people into a great nation. Beginning with just 70 people, people whom he preserves and protects. As we see the family of Israel entering Egypt, we realize that,

**III. GOD PRESERVES HIS PEOPLE.**

The preservation of the nation of Israel was nothing short of miraculous, evident in the first verses of chapter 47. God used Pharaoh to protect Israel. They would have the best part of the land. They would be given the freedom and the ability to shepherd their flocks. And they would even be trusted and honored to care for flocks which Pharaoh might have.

47:5 "Then Pharaoh spoke to Joseph, saying, "Your father and your brothers have come to you. 6 The land of Egypt is before you. Have your father and brothers dwell in the best of the land; let them dwell in the land of Goshen. And if you know any competent men among them, then make them chief herdsmen over my livestock."

From these events, it is easy to see how God would enable the nation of his people to survive. It is easy to see that God would faithfully protect them. Even if they lived in a foreign country. Amazingly, in God's providence, what we see in that foreign country of Egypt is that,

**A. God restores the unity of his people.**

Think about that a little more deeply. For a nation to survive,

for a nation of people to be preserved, a high level of unity would be necessary. “United we stand, divided we fall.”

So God had to restore the unity of those twelve sons of Jacob, unity so violently broken by the wicked cruelty of the brothers toward Joseph. And God does restore the unity of all the brothers. But he does it in Egypt.

Only God would come up with that plan! Only the wise and powerful, sovereign God of heaven and earth would do it this way. The brothers were restored to each other in Egypt. Father and son were restored to each other in Egypt. We read of that personal restoration in,  
v.28-30

Jacob’s life dream was complete. He was completely satisfied, ready to die, to depart this world and be with the Lord. For his one and only great regret had been resolved. He was reunited with the son he had long given up as dead.

There is great human drama in that, and any parent that has even faced even the possibility of the death of a child would grasp Jacob’s human emotion and heart-felt satisfaction. The moment goes beyond words, beyond any description we could offer. In this great human drama, Jacob’s joyful satisfaction is as deep as it could possibly be. But the deepest meaning here is not in the human drama, but the divine drama. God is restoring the unity of his people.

But there would be another immediate problem in Egypt. How would the nation of Israel remain pure? How would they remain distinct? After all, when a relatively small group of people joins a relatively large group of people, the smaller group will invariably lose their identity and in time mingle completely and

indistinguishably with the larger group.

The expectation would be that Israel would cease to be a nation, because they would simply be incorporated and assimilated into the nation of Egypt. But God makes sure that doesn’t happen.

### **B. God protects the purity of his people.**

The purity of Israel has always been God’s concern. The instructions given to Israel are summed up by the prophecy of Isaiah,

Isa. 52:10 “The LORD has made bare His holy arm In the eyes of all the nations; And all the ends of the earth shall see The salvation of our God. 11 Depart! Depart! Go out from there, Touch no unclean thing; Go out from the midst of her, Be clean, You who bear the vessels of the LORD.”

That principle carries over into the NT as well, quoted with such obvious application by the Apostle Paul in,

2Cor. 6:14 “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? 15 And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? 16 And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will dwell in them And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.” 17 Therefore “Come out from among them And be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.” 18 “I will be a Father to you, And you shall be My sons and daughters, Says the LORD Almighty.”

In a moral sense, we are to separate ourselves from the wickedness of this world. If God is to be our God, if God is to be

our Father, we must come out from the world and be separate. That is, we are to live holy lives, separated from sin, distinct from the world. We are to abstain from immorality and keep our lives pure, by God's grace.

So how was that purity and separation to be accomplished while the people of Israel lived in Egypt? Well, God saw to it that Israel would have their own territory in Egypt, that they would be able to keep their own identity.

And he does it by making reference to the occupation of the Israelites as shepherds. It is fair to say that the Egyptians despised the profession of shepherding. And up to this point, apparently, Pharaoh had not been apprised of the fact that the Israelites kept flocks and herds. So Joseph instructs his brothers to make that fact known to Pharaoh openly and forthrightly. And his reason is clearly stated. Once Pharaoh knows that the Israelites are shepherds, he will want them kept isolated and segregated from the Egyptians, so as to avoid causing offense to his own people.

Isn't God great? He uses a prejudice and hatred deeply rooted in the Egyptians to protect and segregate the nation of Israel! Because of that prejudice and hatred, Israel would not mix with the Egyptians nor be assimilated into Egyptian life. They would remain pure, separate, as the nation of God's people.

v.31-34

That is, of course, exactly what happened.

47:1-6

I might even add that the land of Goshen, a fertile land well suited for their flocks and herds, was also quite close to Canaan, and would be a place easy to leave when the time arrived for their

return to the promised land. And so the overall lesson of this chapter, and the whole series of chapters which we've been studying, is that God will accomplish his good and perfect will. God will bring to pass that which is his good pleasure, that which he has determined before the creation of the world. And everything that he does is GOOD. What security there is in that! What strength.

So may God's encouragement to Jacob be an encouragement to you, the encouragement of the words we read in,

v.3 "I am God, the God of your father; do not fear."