

The Book of Genesis

Lesson 25: Jacob's Family Comes to Egypt -- Genesis 46:1-48:22

Jacob is an old man when the unbelievable news reaches him: Joseph is alive, and he is ruler over all of Egypt. The son he mourned for twenty-two years is not dead after all. So Jacob gathers everything he has and sets out, but on the way he stops at Beersheba, the place where his father Isaac worshiped, and he offers sacrifices to God. He is about to leave the Promised Land, the land of the promise, to go down to a foreign country, and he is afraid. Is this right? Is this the end of everything God swore to his fathers? And in the night, God speaks: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt... I myself will go down with you, and I will also bring you up again." God meets the old man's fear with the oldest promise of all: I will go with you.

And so the reunion comes. Joseph rides out in his chariot to meet his father, and when he sees him he falls on his neck and weeps a long time, and Jacob says, "Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive." The family settles in the rich pastureland of Goshen, exactly as God provided, safe from the famine, preserved as a people. What looked, years ago, like the destruction of the family, a son betrayed and sold, is revealed now as the way God kept the whole family alive. The providence that ran underground through all those dark chapters comes up into the daylight: God was saving them the whole time.

But Jacob never forgets where home really is. Even in the comfort of Egypt, as his death approaches, he makes Joseph swear to carry his body back to the land of promise, to bury him with Abraham and Isaac. He will not let his family grow too comfortable in Egypt and forget that this is not their final home. "I am about to die," he tells Joseph, "but God will be with you and bring you again to the land of your fathers." His faith reaches past his own grave and holds onto the promise of God for the generations to come.

And in one of the most tender scenes in Genesis, the blind old patriarch gathers Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to bless them. He crosses his hands, putting the younger ahead of the older once again, God's grace refusing to be bound by human convention, and he blesses the boys in the name of "the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil." Here is the summary of a long, hard, faithful life: God has shepherded me, God has redeemed me, and now I hand these children to that same God. Read this passage and let an old man teach you how to trust God in transition, how to see His providence over your story, how to finish well, and how to hand your faith to those who come after you.

Group Discussion: As Jacob set out for Egypt, afraid, God told him, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt... I myself will go down with you, and I will also bring you up again" (46:3-4). Why do you think Jacob needed this reassurance, and where do you most need to hear "I will go with you" in your own life right now?

Personal Reflection: Near the end of his life, Jacob summed up his whole journey by speaking of “the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day, the angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (48:15–16). If you looked back over your life, where could you trace God’s shepherding and redeeming hand, even through the hard parts?

Read Genesis 46:1–48:22

Study Questions

1. As Jacob feared leaving the Promised Land for Egypt, God reassured him, “Do not be afraid... I myself will go down with you, and I will also bring you up again” (46:1–4). What does this teach us about God’s presence and reassurance in seasons of change, fear, and transition?
2. What change, transition, or uncertain step are you facing, or avoiding, right now? How does the promise of God’s presence, “I will go with you,” speak to your fear?
3. The family that was once nearly destroyed by betrayal was now preserved and provided for in Egypt, just as God had planned and even foretold (46:3; compare 15:13–16). What does this teach us about God’s providence in preserving His people and working out His larger purposes?
4. Where can you see God’s providence and provision at work in the story of your own life or family, even in events that seemed difficult or unwelcome at the time?
5. Even in comfortable Egypt, Jacob’s faith reached beyond his own death; he insisted on being buried in the Promised Land, trusting God’s promise for the generations to come (47:29–31; 48:21). What does this teach us about living and dying with faith in God’s promises, and about not growing too at home in this world?
6. How does keeping eternity and God’s promises in view shape the way you live now? What would it look like for you to “finish well,” holding to God’s promises to the very end?
7. Jacob summarized his life by testifying to “the God who has been my shepherd all my life long... the angel who has redeemed me from all evil” (48:15–16). What does it mean to know God as our faithful Shepherd and Redeemer across a whole lifetime?
8. When you recount your own life, do you see and give thanks for God’s faithfulness, His shepherding and redeeming, through it all? How might regularly remembering God’s faithfulness strengthen your present faith?
9. In blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, the dying Jacob deliberately passed on the covenant faith and blessing to the next generation, handing his grandchildren to the God who had been faithful to him (48:1–20). Why is the intentional passing on of faith to children and grandchildren so important, and how is it done (compare Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Ephesians 6:4)?
10. Look back over the whole passage. Name one specific way God is calling you to trust His presence in transition, to see His providence over your story, to finish well, and to pass your faith on to those who come after you.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 11:21-22, Jacob and Joseph acting by faith concerning the future; Genesis 15:13-16, God foretelling the sojourn in Egypt and the return; Deuteronomy 6:4-9, teaching God's words diligently to our children; Ephesians 6:4, bringing children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord; 2 Timothy 1:5, the faith that lived first in Timothy's grandmother and mother.