

Genesis 46-47

These two chapters tell two stories, with the first story overlapping the two chapters. The first story is that of Jacob's family resettling to Egypt. The second story is of Joseph masterminding the enslavement of all of Egypt.

Chapter 46 initiates the journey from Canaan (the Land of Promise) to Egypt. The writer uses the names Israel and Jacob, interchangeably, perhaps bridging the connection between person (Jacob) and soon to be nation (Israel). The trip does not begin however without an encounter with God. As was the case in every move of Jacob's, God was there. In this encounter, God promises Jacob three things. First that God will go with him to Egypt. Second that Jacob's family will grow into a great nation in Egypt. Third that God will bring the people back to the Land of Promise. In a sense this is God giving permission to Jacob to leave the land of Promise and God's promise that Jacob's descendants will return, meaning the Promise will live on.

As the family begins its journey we are given a list of all the members of the clan of Jacob, including Joseph's children that were born in Egypt. This list is similar to those in Numbers which were used, at a later date, to help determine who was a true Israelite. Judah is sent ahead to let Joseph know that the family is arriving in the land of Goshen. Joseph takes his chariot and goes out to meet them. When Jacob and Joseph meet it is a happy reunion, and Jacob now believes he can go to his grave satisfied that his son is alive. Chapter 47 opens with Joseph needing to hatch a plan to ensure that his family is not only well received by Pharaoh, but that Pharaoh sends them to Goshen, which is land distant from the center of power and intrigue. He does this by instructing his brothers to tell the Pharaoh that they are shepherds, which was an occupation that is abominable to Egyptians. Several of the brothers are introduced to Pharaoh, explain that they are shepherds and Pharaoh is happy to send them away (while also placing his cattle under their care...ala Joseph). The final meeting is between Pharaoh and Jacob, in which Jacob blesses Pharaoh and departs.

The second half of the chapter concerns Joseph's manipulation of the Egyptian people so that they will all become slaves of Pharaoh. Because of the famine, the people need the grain that Joseph has stored. At first, they pay for it, but soon their money runs out. Joseph then has them pay with their livestock. When the livestock all belong to Pharaoh, Joseph has them pay for it with their land. Finally, when all the money, land and livestock are Pharaoh's (except that of the priests), Joseph has them pay for it with their freedom and so Egypt becomes a nation of slaves, who when they do produce anything owe 20% of it to Pharaoh. As the chapter ends, Jacob is near death and obtains a promise that he will be buried in the land of Promise.

Reflections: This chapter is a cautionary tale of what happens to people who leave behind the sojourning ways God's people and settle into positions of power in established civilizations. We see this in that Joseph has taken on the values of Pharaoh. Though he cares for and protects his family, the same cannot be said of his care for the Egyptians. He is more than happy to be Pharaoh's agent of enslavement. This enslavement, becomes the pattern which will ultimately be used by a new Pharaoh to enslave God's people. In a sense, what goes around comes around.

Questions:

1. Where have you seen good people corrupted by power?
2. What lessons can you take from Joseph's life and story?
3. What part of this cautionary tale might be helpful to you in your faith journey?