



Genesis - Chapter Forty Five

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.c Genesis 37:1-50:26 - Jacob's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Forty Five

Moved by Judah's speech, Joseph is unable to restrain his emotions. To the consternation of his shocked brothers, he reveals that he is Joseph. In a long speech he attempts to dissipate their sense of guilt by stressing God's role in sending him to Egypt in order to preserve the lives of his family. With the famine set to continue for another five years, Joseph sends his brothers back to Canaan in order to bring the rest of his family to Egypt.

II.c.x Genesis 45:1-28 - Joseph Reveals Himself to His Brothers

The narrator makes no comment on whether Joseph's overall strategy with his brothers was right, and it is unclear just what Moses expected his audience to think. Probably he was more interested in the consequences: the brothers were led to acknowledge their guilt in the matter of Joseph, and also to be concerned for their father and their youngest brother. Further, this is what enables the reconciliation between them and Joseph. The first audience would recognise the value of courageous self-sacrifice and reconciliation, not simply on the family level, but on the level of the whole people of God – values that they would themselves need to practice in order to meet the claims of their calling.

¹ Then Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him, and he cried out, 'Send everyone away from me.' So no one stayed with him when Joseph made himself known to his brothers.

² And he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard it, and the household of Pharaoh heard it. ³ Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am Joseph. Is my

father still alive?’ But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence.

Gen 45:1-3

Joseph could no longer control himself before all those who stood by him. Joseph ordered all the Egyptians out of the room and was then alone with his brothers. His great emotion showed that Joseph did not cruelly manipulate his brothers. He was directed by God to make these arrangements and it hurt him to do it.

Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Jewish legend says the brothers could never believe this high Egyptian official was Joseph unless he showed he was circumcised and they believe that he would have done so. However, he would have known details about the family that could not have been known by a stranger and it is more likely he recounted such tales to prove his identity.

Is my father still alive? Although the brothers had said so during early dialogue with Joseph, he wants to make certain that Jacob was still living for he longed to be reunited with his father.

But his brothers could not answer him, so dismayed were they at his presence. Because of the punishment they anticipated, the great emotion of Joseph, his manner of revelation, and the total shock of learning Joseph was not only alive but right in front of them, the brothers were dismayed. The ancient Hebrew word for dismayed, *bahal*, actually means, amazed or frightened or even terrified: <<*When I think of it I am dismayed, and shuddering seizes my flesh*>> (Job 21:6), <<*Therefore I am terrified at his presence; when I consider, I am in dread of him*>> (Job 23:15), <<*When the disciples heard this, they fell to the ground and were overcome by fear*>> (Matthew 17:6), and: <<*But when they saw him walking on the lake, they thought it was a ghost and cried out; for they all saw him and were terrified. But immediately he spoke to them and said, ‘Take heart, it is I; do not be afraid’*>> (Mark 6:49-50).

Their dismay was a shadow of what will happen when the Jewish people see Jesus for who he really is: <<*And I will pour out a spirit of compassion and supplication on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that, when they look on the one whom they have pierced, they shall mourn for him, as one mourns for an only child, and weep bitterly over him, as one weeps over a firstborn*>> (Zechariah 12:10).

⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, ‘Come closer to me.’ And they came closer. He said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.’ ⁵ And now do not be distressed, or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life.

⁶ For the famine has been in the land these two years; and there are five more years in which there will be neither ploughing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. ⁸ So it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt.

Gen. 45:4-8

Come closer to me implies the brothers cringed back in terror. Jewish legends, which are only legends, say the brothers were so shocked that their souls left their bodies and it was only by a miracle of God their souls came back.

God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. All Joseph's sorrows were for a purpose. God used them to preserve his family and provide the conditions for it to become a nation. Joseph was a victim of men, but God turned it around for his glory: <<*Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today*>> (Genesis 50:20), <<*You have granted me life and steadfast love, and your care has preserved my spirit*>> (Job 10:12), and: <<*When he summoned famine against the land, and broke every staff of bread, he had sent a man ahead of them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave*>> (Psalm 105:16-17). None of it was for a loss. If this family did not go into Egypt, then they would assimilate among the pagan tribes of Canaan and cease to become a distinctive people. God had to put them in a place where they could grow, yet remain a distinctive nation.

So it was not you who sent me here, but God. Joseph realised God ruled his life, not good men, not evil men, not circumstances or fate. God was in control, and because God was in control all things worked together for good: <<*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*>> (Romans 8:28).

A father to Pharaoh. This is probably not a specific title that was given to Joseph but rather a designation he uses in order to mark out his role as someone who is committed to Pharaoh's well-being. For a similar use of the term father, refer to the comment made on 17:4-5.

⁹ Hurry and go up to my father and say to him, "Thus says your son Joseph, God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰ You shall settle in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your children's children, as well as your flocks, your herds, and all that you have. ¹¹ I will provide for you there

— since there are five more years of famine to come — so that you and your household, and all that you have, will not come to poverty.”¹² And now your eyes and the eyes of my brother Benjamin see that it is my own mouth that speaks to you.¹³ You must tell my father how greatly I am honoured in Egypt, and all that you have seen. Hurry and bring my father down here.’¹⁴ Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck.¹⁵ And he kissed all his brothers and wept upon them; and after that his brothers talked with him.

Gen. 45:9-15

Thus says your son Joseph. When Jacob eventually heard this it was one of the greatest days of his life. He had the joy of learning that the favoured son, who would save his brethren, who was given up for dead, is now alive and they will be together again.

The land of Goshen. The precise location of Goshen is disputed; it was probably a region in the eastern delta area of the Nile suitable for herdsmen, in the area of the Wadi Tumilat. This Goshen should be distinguished from the one mentioned in Joshua 10:41, 11:16 and 15:51. Joseph chooses the region of Goshen because of its suitability for herdsmen and its close proximity to him. This location probably also lessened the likelihood of Jacob’s family being absorbed into Egyptian society as Joseph had been, enabling them to retain their ethnic and religious distinctiveness.

The Egyptian text Papyrus Anastasis VI tells of Pharaoh Merneptah, in approximately 1220 BC, allowing Edomite nomads to live in Goshen ‘to keep themselves and their flocks alive in the territory of the king.’

Then he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck and wept, while Benjamin wept upon his neck. This signifies the deep love and affection Joseph had for Benjamin and is reminiscent of how Esau felt when he was reunited with Jacob: <<*But Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck and kissed him, and they wept*>> (Genesis 33:4), and Joseph would do so when he was finally reunited with his father: <<*Joseph made ready his chariot and went up to meet his father Israel in Goshen. He presented himself to him, fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while*>> (Genesis 46:29).

He kissed all his brothers and wept upon them. Joseph did not exclude those who had been especially cruel to him. His heart was open to his brothers both as a group and as individuals. This was like the father receiving back his lost son: <<*So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw*

him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him>> (Luke 15:20).

After that his brothers talked with him. It seems that the focus of this conversation would have been joyous, not focusing on the wrong his brothers had done to Joseph, but catching up on news of the family and what had happened to Joseph during his years in Egypt.

¹⁶ When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house, 'Joseph's brothers have come', Pharaoh and his servants were pleased. ¹⁷ Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Say to your brothers, "Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan. ¹⁸ Take your father and your households and come to me, so that I may give you the best of the land of Egypt, and you may enjoy the fat of the land." ¹⁹ You are further charged to say, "Do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Give no thought to your possessions, for the best of all the land of Egypt is yours.'"

Gen 45:16-20

When the report was heard in Pharaoh's house. Good news travels fast, even into the court of Pharaoh. It is not stated whether Pharaoh knew anything of Joseph's family background but he would know that it would bring him pleasure to be reunited after more than twenty years apart.

Enjoy the fat of the land. Although they were still in the grip of famine, the parts of Egypt along the river and especially in the Nile Delta would again bring an abundance of crops and produce good grazing land for animals: *<<If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land>>* (Isaiah 1:19).

Take wagons from the land of Egypt. It demonstrates how highly Pharaoh regarded Joseph that he would allow these foreigners to take away logistic provision so that the whole family could be brought back to Egypt in style and relative comfort.

The best of all the land of Egypt is yours. Pharaoh's generosity knew no bounds when it came to ensuring the family would be well cared for to the point where he told them they need have no regard for their current possessions; they would soon receive so much more.

²¹ The sons of Israel did so. Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey.

²² To each one of them he gave a set of garments; but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. ²³ To his

father he sent the following: ten donkeys loaded with the good things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and provision for his father on the journey.²⁴ Then he sent his brothers on their way, and as they were leaving he said to them, ‘Do not quarrel along the way.’

Gen. 45:21-24

Joseph gave them wagons according to the instruction of Pharaoh, and he gave them provisions for the journey. The sons of Israel received transportation, provision, garments, and riches because of who their favoured brother was. Pharaoh blessed the sons of Jacob for Joseph’s sake. Boice wrote: ‘To return to Canaan with ‘carts from Egypt’ was the cultural equivalent of landing a jumbo jet among a tribe of isolated savages. It would be the stuff legends are made of.’

To each one of them he gave a set of garments. Joseph lavishes gifts on his brothers, treating Benjamin with exceptional generosity, and sends them away with additional gifts for his father.

Three hundred pieces of silver. Previously Joseph had been sold into slavery for a mere 20 shekels (37:28).

Joseph’s admonition: Do not quarrel along the way, may have been necessary for his brothers; but the narrator records it in light of his purpose to promote unity among the people of God who read this; refer to the comment made on vv.1-28.

²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶ And they told him, ‘Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.’ He was stunned; he could not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him all the words of Joseph that he had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ Israel said, ‘Enough! My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.’

Gen. 45:25-28

Unsurprisingly, Jacob struggles to believe that Joseph not only is alive but is also ruler over all the land of Egypt. Through time, however, he is persuaded that this is true, especially by the gifts that Joseph has sent. He then consents to visit Joseph.

He was stunned; he could not believe them. Jacob was told Joseph was dead and believed it. Then he was told Joseph was still alive, and he could not believe it

until his sons told him the words of Joseph and showed him the blessings that came to them through Joseph: *<<but I did not believe the reports until I came and my own eyes had seen it. Not even half had been told me; your wisdom and prosperity far surpass the report that I had heard>>* (1 Kings 10:7). Then he believed Joseph was alive, even though he had not yet seen him.

I must go and see him before I die. Knowing that the favoured son was alive, back from the dead, as it were, changed Israel's testimony from *<<All this has happened to me!>>* (Genesis 42:36b) to enough! This testimony of faith comes from Israel, not Jacob. When Jacob was in charge, he seemed to become a whining, self-pitying, complaining, unbelieving type of man. By contrast Israel, the man God had conquered, had a testimony of faith, a faith that would endure: *<<By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, 'bowing in worship over the top of his staff'>>* (Hebrews 11:21).