



Genesis - Chapter Forty Six

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

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

Summary of Chapter Forty Six

Jacob commences his journey to Egypt. At Beer-sheba God appears to Jacob, promising that he will be with Jacob in Egypt, and restating the promises made to Abraham and Isaac that the Hebrews will be a great nation. He makes the further promise that Jacob will see Joseph again before he dies and that he will be buried in Canaan.

The account then goes on to list all the children and grandchildren of Jacob that make the journey into Egypt, lists two grandsons who died in Canaan and two that were born to Joseph in Egypt that he had never met.

As they approached Egypt, Jacob sent Judah to tell Joseph, who immediately set out to be reunited with his father. Joseph then instructs them on what they are to say when he takes them to meet with Pharaoh.

II.c.xi Genesis 46:1-27 - Jacob Brings His Whole Family to Egypt

This section falls into two distinct parts: the itinerary for Jacob's journey to Egypt (vv.1-7); and a register, based on genealogical information, of those who were members of Jacob's family when they settled in Egypt (vv.8-27).

¹ When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.

Genesis 46:1

When Israel set out on his journey with all that he had and came to Beer-sheba. Setting out, possibly from Hebron (37:14), Jacob travels south to Beer-sheba, where his father Isaac (26:23-33) and grandfather Abraham (21:22-34) lived for a time. Beer-sheba was the southernmost outpost of Canaan on the way to Egypt. Israel stopped there to honour God with sacrifices. Israel's grandfather Abraham planted a tamarisk tree in Beer-sheba many years before and had called on the name of the Lord there (21:33). Isaac received a special promise from God and built an altar for sacrifice there, calling on the name of the Lord (26:24-25). It was probably at this very place at which Israel offered his sacrifice.

² God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he said, 'Here I am.' ³ Then he said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make of you a great nation there. ⁴ I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again; and Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes.'

Genesis 46:2-4

Before Jacob leaves for Egypt, God speaks to him in a vision at night. Previously God had prohibited Isaac from going to Egypt during a time of famine (26:1-5). Given this earlier prohibition and what had happened to Abraham in Egypt during another famine (12:10-20), Jacob may well have been reluctant to go there. God had promised that Abraham would become a great nation, and this theme runs throughout Chapters 12-50.

I am God, the God of your father. This was no angelic messenger sent to reassure Jacob but a vision of God himself, promising to Jacob what he had done to those who had gone before him. In Hebraic understanding, father could refer to either Isaac or Abraham or indeed both.

I myself will go down with you. God had made and kept similar promises when Jacob went to Paddan-aram (28:15).

I will also bring you up again is both a promise of the exodus from Egypt like 15:13-16 and a reassurance that Jacob himself will be buried in the Promised Land. God reassures Jacob that his journey to Egypt will not undermine the divine promises that centre on Canaan. Although Jacob will die in Egypt (49:33), he will then be buried with his ancestors, Abraham and Isaac, in Canaan (49:29-50:13). While the patriarchs died before witnessing the fulfilment of God's redemptive purposes for the whole world, they believed that their eternal destiny was secure because of their relationship with God, refer to Hebrews 11:12-16 and 11:39.

Joseph's own hand shall close your eyes. This was a further assurance from God that Joseph was indeed still alive and that he would be there to care for his father until the day that Jacob died.

⁵ Then Jacob set out from Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their little ones, and their wives, in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶ They also took their livestock and the goods that they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and they came into Egypt, Jacob and all his offspring with him, ⁷ his sons, and his sons' sons with him, his daughters, and his sons' daughters; all his offspring he brought with him into Egypt.

Genesis 46:5-7

All his offspring he brought with him into Egypt. These verses underline that Jacob took with him to Egypt everything that he possessed, including all the members of his family. These general comments prepare for the more detailed register of family members that comes in vv.8-27.

An illustration of what this would have looked like comes from the Beni Hasan Mural from the 19th Century BC, which was found in an Egyptian tomb. It depicts a group of Asiatics as they travel into Egypt. The group brought animals, weapons, and musical instruments. All the men are bearded, and they wear clothes with elaborate designs.

Introduction to Genesis 46:8-27

The register of Jacob's family is organised according to his wives, beginning with Leah's children (vv.8-15) and proceeding to those of Zilpah (vv.16-18), Rachel (vv.19-22), and Bilhah (vv.23-25). Verses 26-27 appear to provide a concluding summary, although the lists and associated numbers present difficulties. Since v.20 includes Joseph and his sons, who were already in Egypt, it is not simply recording those who migrated there with Jacob at this particular time.

⁸ Now these are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his offspring, who came to Egypt. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, ⁹ and the children of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰ The children of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul, the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹ The children of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹² The children of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the children of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³ The children of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Jashub, and Shimron. ¹⁴ The children of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel ¹⁵ (these are the

sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; in all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three).

Genesis 46:8-15

Associated with Leah are six sons, one daughter, 25 grandsons, and two great-grandsons – a total of 34. To reduce this to thirty-three, some scholars have speculated that the name Ohad should be removed, since it does not appear in the parallel lists of Numbers 26:12-13 and 1 Chronicles 4:24. Alternatively, it could be argued that Dinah, the only daughter mentioned, should be omitted from the final count. Yet at least two of the grandsons, Er and Onan, died in Canaan (38:2-10), and it seems unlikely that Perez' two sons, Hezron and Hamul, were born before Jacob moved to Egypt. These observations indicate that the thirty-three mentioned at the end of v.15 were not derived simply from the names listed, and the number thirty-three is not intended as a total of the list just given. Although Reuben was the first son to be born to Jacob, the official status of firstborn was transferred to Joseph: <<*The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel. (He was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel, so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright; though Judah became prominent among his brothers and a ruler came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph)*>> (1 Chronicles 5:1-2).

The children of Judah are of special interest to Christians because this is the Messianic lineage. The line of descent to this point went like this: Abraham to Isaac to Jacob to Judah to Perez to Hezron (Luke 3:33-34).

In all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three. The reference to daughters here is puzzling, since only one daughter, Dinah, is mentioned in the preceding list. This is another indication that thirty-three may not be intended as the total of the names in vv.8-14, but represents some other method of counting.

¹⁶ The children of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷ The children of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. The children of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel ¹⁸ (these are the children of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and these she bore to Jacob – sixteen persons).

Genesis 46:16-18

These are the children of Zilpah. Having listed the firstborn sons by Leah in the initial account, the narrator then chooses to list the children born to her maid Zilpah, whom she had given to Jacob when she had stopped conceiving.

Serah is the only other granddaughter named in the register. Her name is required in order to make up the final total of sixteen persons.

¹⁹ The children of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰ To Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. ²¹ The children of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard ²² (these are the children of Rachel, who were born to Jacob – fourteen persons in all).

Genesis 46:19-22

These are the children of Rachel. Although Rachel was the wife whom Jacob truly loved, she was the last to bear him children and therefore is listed after her sister Leah and her maid Zilpah, but before her own maid Bilhah. On Joseph's wife and sons, refer to the comment made on 41:45.

²³ The children of Dan: Hashum. ²⁴ The children of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem ²⁵ (these are the children of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and these she bore to Jacob – seven persons in all).

Genesis 46:23-25

These are the children of Bilhah. As Rachel's maid, Bilhah's children are listed last even though they were born before Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁶ All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own offspring, not including the wives of his sons, were sixty-six persons in all. ²⁷ The children of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the persons of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt were seventy.

Genesis 46:26-27

The relationship between the numbers sixty-six and seventy presents another difficulty. The four totals linked to Jacob's wives in vv.8-25 add up to seventy, i.e. 33, 16, 14, and 7, which is the figure recorded in v.27, and is confirmed by: <<*Your ancestors went down to Egypt seventy persons; and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in heaven*>> (Deuteronomy 10:22). Yet v.26 mentions sixty-six persons as belonging to Jacob, excluding his sons' wives, none of whom is named in the preceding verses.

The difference between the two figures cannot be:

1. Jacob's four wives, because Rachel died in Canaan (35:16-20).
2. Joseph, Ephraim, and Manasseh, who were already in Egypt.
3. Er and Onan, who died in Canaan.

These observations indicate that the numbers given should be treated with caution, a point reinforced by the fact that the earliest Greek translation, the Septuagint, adjusts upward the number of sons born to Joseph from two to nine and consequently totals the number of Jacob's descendants in Egypt as 75 and not 70, refer to Acts 7:14 and its associated comment on the website. It looks as if the Hebrew manuscript tradition from which the translators worked was not unanimous at this point. Perhaps 70 is treated here as a round number, representing the ideal, conveying the idea that all Israel went down to Egypt.

II.c.xii Genesis 46:28-47:12 - Jacob Settles in Goshen

Joseph uses his God-given administrative skills to ensure that his family settles safely in Egypt. Having previously decided that the land of Goshen would be the best location for them, refer to the comment made on 45:10, through skilful preparation and diplomacy, Joseph ensures that Pharaoh confirms this choice of territory as a settlement for his family.

²⁸ Israel sent Judah ahead to Joseph to lead the way before him into Goshen. When they came to the land of Goshen, ²⁹ 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. ³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, 'I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive.'

Genesis 46:28-30

Once again the narrator observes that Judah took the lead. Judah's role as the leader of his brothers anticipates the blessing that his father will bestow on him: <<*Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness – who dares rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk*>> (Genesis 49:8-12). This will later be confirmed when his descendants are chosen to lead the nation in their march through the

wilderness: <<*The total enrolment of the camp of Judah, by companies, is one hundred and eighty-six thousand four hundred. They shall set out first on the march*>> (Numbers 2:9).

I can die now, having seen for myself that you are still alive. This reunion of Israel with Joseph is more than he ever dreamed before. He had of the death of Joseph that: <<*No, I shall go down to Sheol to my son, mourning*>> (Genesis 37:35b); now he is content to die in happiness at this reunion.

³¹ Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'I will go up and tell Pharaoh, and will say to him, "My brothers and my father's household, who were in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³² The men are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock; and they have brought their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have."

³³ When Pharaoh calls you, and says, "What is your occupation?" ³⁴ you shall say, "Your servants have been keepers of livestock from our youth even until now, both we and our ancestors" – in order that you may settle in the land of Goshen, because all shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians.'

Genesis 46:31-34

Joseph gives advice to his brothers, anticipating that they will be summoned into Pharaoh's presence. To ensure that they will be given the land of Goshen, he instructs them to say that they are keepers of livestock, i.e. cattle and sheep, and that this is their traditional occupation. This information may also have been designed to reassure Pharaoh that Joseph's family would not endanger national security since they were peaceable people.

All shepherds are abhorrent to the Egyptians. The precise reason for the Egyptians' aversion toward shepherds is not known, although it may have a religious dimension related to the offering of sacrifices: <<*But Moses said, 'It would not be right to do so; for the sacrifices that we offer to the LORD our God are offensive to the Egyptians. If we offer in the sight of the Egyptians sacrifices that are offensive to them, will they not stone us?'*>> (Exodus 8:26). This may also be linked to the refusal of Egyptians to eat with Hebrews (43:32).