

Genesis 46:1-47:6  
Psalm 77  
Acts 7

“Going Down to Egypt”

December 27, 2009

In Genesis 46 the LORD spoke to Jacob in the visions of the night,  
and he commanded him to go down to Egypt.  
Generations later, no doubt, there were those who wondered at this.  
Enslaved by Pharaoh and oppressed for hundreds of years  
it would have been easy to wonder, “why is God letting this happen?”  
“Why did God send us here?”

As we have over and over again throughout Genesis  
God’s timing is not like ours!  
We think that a few weeks of suffering is too much.  
A minor setback is more than we can handle.

We need to remember the deeds of the LORD.  
His ways are not our ways.  
And his thoughts are not our thoughts.  
We would fix everything and make it right *right now*.  
But that is not God’s way.

As we come to the end of 2009 –  
and we reflect on all that went wrong over the last year –  
all that has happened that is *not right* –  
we need to remember that in the middle of history this is the way God does things.

Why?  
Why does God send you such tribulation and distress?

He does this so that you might not love this age.  
He does this so that you might long for a heavenly kingdom –  
that you might meditate on the day when things will be as they should be –  
when *we* will be as we should be!

To quote one who has learned this through suffering:  
“These are not the golden years.  
These are the rusty years.  
The golden years come hereafter!”

And yet our God graciously gives us occasional glimpses of the glory of Christ  
so that we might press on in the hope of eternal life.

That is why we are singing Psalm 77 in response to Genesis 46.  
Psalm 77 is very much a Psalm of one who looks back to “the good old days.”

There are two ways of looking back at the good old days.  
There is the way of nostalgia,  
and there is the way of remembering.  
What is the difference between nostalgia and memory?

Christopher Lasch has explained it very well:  
Nostalgia invariably disparages the present.  
Memory does not.

“Nostalgia appeals to the feeling that the past offered delights no longer obtainable.  
Nostalgic representations of the past evoke a time irretrievably lost  
and for that reason timeless and unchanging.  
Strictly speaking, nostalgia does not entail the exercise of memory at all,  
since the past it idealizes stands outside time,  
frozen in unchanging perfection.”

What about memory?

“Memory too may idealize the past, but not in order to condemn the present.  
It draws hope and comfort from the past in order to enrich the present  
and to face what comes with good cheer.” [Christopher Lasch,  
The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics, ch. 3, Norton (1991).]

Psalm 77 is all about memory.

Asaph remembers God.  
He longs for God.  
He seeks the Lord.

He wonders:

Will God ever be favorable again?  
Has his steadfast love forever ceased?  
Are his promises at an end for all time?  
Has God forgotten to be gracious?  
Has he in anger shut up his compassion? (77:8-9)

Nostalgia would look back and bemoan the loss of the “good old days.”

But Asaph’s remembering brings hope:

*I will remember the deeds of the LORD;  
yes I will remember your wonders of old.  
I will ponder all your work,  
and meditate on your mighty deeds. (77:11-12)*

And he reflects on “the good old days” when God redeemed Jacob and Joseph –  
when the Red Sea fled before the LORD  
and “You led your people like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron.” (77:20)

And if Asaph were longing for the “good old days” of Moses and Aaron,  
then we could justly accuse him of nostalgia!

What?!

You want to go back to the days of Israel in the wilderness?

The wilderness generation that rebelled time after time?

But Asaph is not longing for the “good old days” –

he does not want to go back.

He is remembering *God's* wondrous works.

We must beware of nostalgia.

Because nostalgia is a sin!

Why?

Because nostalgia looks back at the good old days and says,

“they will never come again.”

But *how dare* we think that away about the works of God!

*HOW DARE* we think that “the crash of your thunder”

will never again be heard?

Do we really believe, “Your way, O God, is holy?”

Do we really confess, “What god is great like our God?”

You are the God who works wonders;

you have made known your might among the peoples.” (77:13-14)

Brothers and sisters,

*this* is why I continue to preach the whole of the scriptures.

We need to remember these stories –

not because they tell us how to live,

not because they tell us how to make our lives “better” –

Heavens, No!

Are you longing for “the way things used to be”?

Seriously?

All you want is for things to be a “little better”?

It would be like Asaph wishing that the king in his day was as good as David.

Yeah, the David who committed adultery and murder,

whose son rebelled against him and saw murder and mayhem all his life.

No!

The scriptures are *not* first and foremost about making our lives better here and now.

If all you are looking for is “a little better” here and now,

then I’m sorry, but you picked the wrong religion!

Islam will serve you far better!

The scriptures are first and foremost about the regeneration of the universe!

The new creation!

Your hope is not that life is going to get better here and now!

Your hope is that your life is *now* hidden with Christ in God.  
And when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.  
(Col 3:4)

That's why we need to remember all these stories in the OT:  
because *we need to believe that God acts in history!*

We need to remember God's wondrous acts!  
Because this is the story of how God has acted in Jesus Christ  
to deliver us from all his and our enemies.

So let us sing Psalm 77.

We hear the same attitude toward memory in Acts 7.  
Stephen had just been arrested for blasphemy.  
He is standing trial before the council on the charge,  
given in 6:13-14 –  
“This man never ceases to speak words against this holy place and the law,  
for we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place  
and will change the customs that Moses delivered to us.”

Read Acts 7

We need to see Genesis 46-47 together,  
but unlike the previous four chapters, it is not essential to cover both in the same sermon!

At the beginning of chapter 46 God promises Jacob, “I myself will go down with you to Egypt,  
and I will also bring you up again...”

At the end of chapter 47, Jacob makes Joseph swear to bury his bones in the Promised Land.

The second point in chapter 46 is about the offspring of Jacob that came down to Egypt.  
The next to the last point in chapter 47 is about how Egypt bowed to the offspring of Jacob.

And the third point of chapter 46 (and the third from the last point at the beginning of chapter 47)  
we hear of how Jacob's family is settled in the land of Goshen.

[for next week]

- 4'. Jacob before Pharaoh (47:7-10)
- 3'. Joseph settles Jacob in the land of Goshen (47:11-12)
- 2'. Egypt under Joseph (47:13-26)
- 1'. Jacob will be buried in the land (47:27-31)

Which means that the appearances of Joseph and his brothers and Jacob before Pharaoh  
is at the heart of this passage.

But we're only going to tackle the first half of this today!

## 1. God Will Go Down to Egypt with Israel (46:1-7)

*46:1 So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.*

Israel is about to leave the promised land.

This is a dangerous thing to do!

Every other time that the patriarchs leave the promised land, something bad happens.

Indeed, if you know the story of Exodus, then you are probably saying,

“Don’t do it!

Remember what God said to Abraham –

your descendents will be enslaved for 400 years!”

If God was a god who emphasized the here and now,

then he never would have sent Jacob to Egypt.

But God’s purpose is far grander than anything even Jacob could imagine!

But notice this:

sometimes God calls his people to do things that have dire consequences.

Your decisions may adversely affect your children and grandchildren:

and yet your decision may be *right!*

But you are not called to determine the future of your grandchildren.

You are called to do what God has put in front of you to do!

And so Israel offers sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac,

as he had in 31:54,

but this time at Beersheba –

which was one of the places where Abraham had built an altar.

*2 And God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, “Jacob, Jacob.”*

*And he said, “Here am I.”*

*3 Then he said, “I am God, the God of your father.*

*Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation.*

*4 I myself will go down with you to Egypt,*

*and I will also bring you up again,*

*and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes.”*

This is the last time that God speaks for 430 years.

The next time that we will hear the voice of the LORD

is at the burning bush, when God will speak to Moses.

Think about this:

God tells Jacob to go down to Egypt.

Go to the land where your children will be enslaved.

God is teaching his people something.  
There is no way to life except through death.  
There is no way to freedom except through bondage.  
You cannot bypass the way of the cross.  
There is no shortcut that can avoid Jesus.

But at the heart of this call to bear the cross is the promise:  
“I myself will go down with you...and I will also bring you up again.”

The reason why we can pass through death is because of Immanuel –  
God with us.  
You can endure whatever situation you face  
because Jesus has passed through death into life,  
and Jesus has united you to himself!

*5 Then Jacob set out from Beersheba.*

*The sons of Israel carried Jacob their father, their little ones, and their wives,  
in the wagons that Pharaoh had sent to carry him.*

*6 They also took their livestock and their goods, which they had gained in the land of Canaan,  
and 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.*

We will hear in chapter 47 that all Egypt comes under the rule of Joseph.  
But here in chapter 46 we hear about how all Israel comes under the rule of Egypt.

## **2. From the Twelve to the Seventy: the Sons of Israel under Egypt (46:8-27)**

Do you see all the “sevens” in Jacob’s descendents?

Rachel had 14 descendents (2x7)

Bilhah had half that number (7)

Leah had 33 descendents (there’s no seven there! What’s going on?)

But watch, Zilpah, her handmaid had 16 (half that number) –  
which added together makes 49 (7x7!).

And the grand total is 70 (10x7).

*8 Now these are the names of the descendants of Israel, who came into Egypt, Jacob and his sons.  
Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, 9 and the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi.*

*10 The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul,  
the son of a Canaanite woman.*

*11 The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari.*

*12 The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah  
(but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan);  
and the sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul.*

Just a note: the sons of Perez could not have been born yet!

If Judah started begetting sons shortly after Joseph left for Egypt,  
then we have fewer than 25 years for Judah to begot Er, Onan, and Shelah,  
and for Shelah to reach marriageable age.  
Unless there is some other gap that is not referred to in scripture,  
Perez himself could not be more than three years old at this time!

The text itself indicates that something is different here,  
since it uses a different construction for “the sons of Perez”

*13 The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvah, Yob, and Shimron.*

*14 The sons 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;  
altogether his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three.*

*16 The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli.*

*17 The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, with Serah their sister.*

*And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel.*

*18 These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to Leah his daughter;  
and these she bore to Jacob—sixteen persons.*

*19 The sons of Rachel, Jacob's wife: Joseph and Benjamin.*

*20 And to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim,  
whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera the priest of On, bore to him.*

*21 And the sons of Benjamin:*

*Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard.*

*22 These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob—fourteen persons in all.*

Likewise it is very difficult to conceive of how Benjamin  
could possibly have fathered 10 sons by this point, unless he had multiple wives.  
By this point he is probably around 30 years old.

*23 The sons of Dan: Hushim.*

*24 The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem.*

*25 These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to Rachel his daughter,  
and these she bore to Jacob—seven persons in all.*

*26 All the persons belonging to Jacob who came into Egypt, who were his own descendants,  
not including Jacob's sons' wives, were sixty-six persons in all.*

*27 And the sons 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.*

We don't need to go into all the details,  
but I will mention that there are several discrepancies  
between this genealogy and the genealogies in Chronicles and Numbers.  
In some cases there are grandsons who wind up referred to as sons,

in other cases there are names that appear in one list, or two lists but not the third.

The point of this genealogy is to show that 70 descendants of Jacob went down into Egypt, so even though not all of them had necessarily been born yet, the point is that Jacob has become a great nation.

In Genesis 10 we heard of the table of the nations – where there were 70 names listed. Now Jacob has become a nation.

But we should be careful not to think that only 70 people came down to Egypt.

Jacob and his sons are wealthy men.

We know from 30:43 that Jacob had many male servants and female servants. There were *hundreds* of people that came into Egypt with Jacob – perhaps thousands.

Certainly it would be easy to believe that many of them wound up abandoning Jacob – especially after Israel was enslaved –

but then again, is it likely that the Egyptians cared

whether you were a biological descendent of Jacob?

If you were part of the Israelite tribe, then you would be enslaved as well!

### **3. Joseph Settles Jacob in the Land of Goshen (46:28-34)**

*28 He had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to show the way before him in Goshen, and they came into the land of Goshen.*

Once again, Judah leads his brothers.

Judah is the one who goes before his brothers and brings the family together.

It is interesting to note that with his mission accomplished, and the reconciliation of the family completed,

Judah will drop out of the narrative of Genesis.

He will only be mentioned again in the blessing of the brothers in chapter 49.

*29 Then Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to meet Israel his father in Goshen.*

*He presented himself to him and fell on his neck and wept on his neck a good while.*

*30 Israel said to Joseph,*

*“Now let me die, since I have seen your face and know that you are still alive.”*

*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 And 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 fathers,’*

*in order that you may dwell in the land of Goshen,*

*for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians.”*



Now we are given a clue both as to Joseph's strategy,  
and also God's purpose in the descent into Egypt.  
Joseph's strategy is to emphasize the family's occupation as shepherds,  
so as to keep his family away from Egyptian scrutiny.  
He wants to carve out a territory that will be a safe haven for Israel.

And God's purpose is similar:  
in Canaan Israel is in danger of assimilation.  
In Egypt there is no such danger.  
They are shepherds.  
Egyptians won't eat with Hebrews.  
Egyptians think shepherds are an abomination.

Fine.

Israel will have a place where they can grow into a great nation  
without fear of contamination by their enemies.

And you can see the fulfillment of that strategy and purpose at the beginning of chapter 47,  
as God demonstrates that he indeed does go with Jacob  
to bless him – even in the land of Egypt:

#### **4. Joseph and His Brothers before Pharaoh (47:1-6)**

*47:1 So Joseph went in and told Pharaoh,*

*“My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess,  
have come from the land of Canaan.*

*They are now in the land of Goshen.”*

*2 And from among his brothers he took five men and presented them to Pharaoh.*

*3 Pharaoh said to his brothers, “What is your occupation?”*

*And they said to Pharaoh, “Your servants are shepherds, as our fathers were.”*

*4 They said to Pharaoh,*

*“We have come to sojourn in the land, for there is no pasture for your servants' flocks,  
for the famine is severe in the land of Canaan.*

*And now, please let your servants dwell in the land of Goshen.”*

*5 Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, “Your father and your brothers have come to you.*

*6 The land of Egypt is before you.*

*Settle your father and your brothers in the best of the land.*

*Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them,  
put them in charge of my livestock.”*

Jacob has received favor in the sight of Pharaoh.

Pharaoh certainly does not welcome all foreigners to live in his land –  
and he does *not* invite all foreigners to care for his livestock!

(We are told that one Pharaoh had over 3,000 men caring for his livestock –  
by giving Joseph's brothers a place over his livestock  
he is giving them a high honor rarely given to foreigners.)

What is Pharaoh doing?

In his own mind, he is showing hospitality.

In the ancient world there are few things more important than showing hospitality.

Hospitality is not about “entertaining” people.

Hospitality is “love of strangers.”

Hospitality is a giving of oneself that pours out your heart and soul in their service.

In the modern world we have cheapened hospitality.

We have created the “hospitality industry”

in order to escape the duties of caring for strangers.

Send them to a hotel – send them to a restaurant!

Don’t kill the fattened calf!

But hospitality was not shown randomly to just anyone!

Pharaoh does not invite all nations to come to him!

Pharaoh knows that Joseph has saved him and his people from death.

Pharaoh knows that he is indebted to Joseph.

And so Pharaoh shows lavish hospitality to Joseph’s family –

he offers the best of the land (at great cost to himself).

We will see more about Pharaoh next time!

But here you need to see that Jesus is the great king who shows hospitality to all nations.

He is the great king who has brought us into his household,

and not only given us gifts,

but even made us fellow heirs –

that we might receive *his* inheritance!

And so therefore he calls us to show this sort of hospitality – this love of strangers –

to all those who call upon his name.

Please, brothers and sisters, do *not* entertain each other!

Love each other!

And love strangers – visitors who may come wandering through our doors –

or the stranger whom you meet in the marketplace.

Do not be “calculating” in your care for others!

Pour yourself out in the service of Christ!

After all, what else do you have to do?

I once thanked a friend for the care that he had shown me –

it was truly something “beyond the call of duty,”

and he only replied with a wry smile,

“I had nothing better to do!”

I knew that he was a busy man with a mountain of work waiting for him,  
but he had nothing *better* to do.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul,  
with all your mind, and with all your strength.  
And love your neighbor as yourself.

I can assure you:  
You have nothing better to do!

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