

“CONTINUING TO CLING TO THE LORD IN FAITH”

**I. Introduction**

- A. This chapter introduces the closing section of Genesis, which is itself a transition to the book of Exodus, explaining how the people of Israel ended up living in Egypt.
  - 1. Here we read of the joyful reunion between Jacob and Joseph.
  - 2. We also see the beginning of Israel’s long sojourn in Egypt, which would eventually find the covenant people suffering under great oppression.
  - 3. One of the things that this shows us is that the Lord fulfills his promises in unexpected ways and by means of trials and troubles.
  
- B. Israel’s tenure in Egypt started off well.
  - 1. Joseph was in a position of power, and Pharaoh treated Jacob and his family with honor.
  - 2. Four hundred years later, the people would be crying out to God for deliverance.
  - 3. Yet this chapter makes it clear that it was the will of the Lord for Jacob to leave the Promised Land and go to Egypt.
  - 4. God would be true to his promises, but the timetable for the fulfillment of those promises would extend well beyond Jacob’s lifetime.
  - 5. As we study this passage today, we will see how Jacob continued to cling to the Lord in faith as he waited for the fulfillment of what

had been promised.

## II. Being Led by the Lord Rather Than by Circumstances

- A. Jacob had lived for twenty years thinking that Joseph was dead.
  - 1. But when his sons returned from their second trip to Egypt, they brought news that Joseph was not only alive, but was the most prominent of Pharaoh's officials.
  - 2. After learning this, the thing Jacob would have wanted to do more than anything else was exactly what Joseph had instructed his brothers to tell him to do.
  - 3. Jacob would have wanted to go to Egypt.
  - 4. Joseph was his favorite son, the son whom he thought was dead.
  - 5. Given this unexpected change of circumstances, you can be sure that he wanted to get to Egypt as fast as he could.
- B. But Jacob's next steps show that he was not being guided by circumstances alone.
  - 1. While he did begin to move towards Egypt, before leaving Canaan he stopped at the town of Beersheba and worshipped the Lord there.
  - 2. Beersheba was at the southern boundary of Canaan.
  - 3. Once he passed Beersheba, he would be outside of the Promised Land, with nothing but desert laying before him until he reached Egypt.
  - 4. Beersheba was also the place where Jacob's father Isaac and his grandfather Abraham had worshipped the Lord and made treaties

with the inhabitants of the land of Canaan.

5. In light of this, Beersheba had come to symbolize God's promise to give the land of Canaan to Abraham and his offspring as an everlasting possession.
  6. Surely it is significant that, as Jacob travels to be reunited with his son Joseph, he stops to worship the Lord at this holy site.
- C. We can discern a twofold purpose behind Jacob's decision to do this.
1. On the one hand, he was responding to the good news about Joseph by giving thanks to the Lord in this special place.
  2. This is something for us to reflect upon.
  3. We present many requests to the Lord every day.
  4. We pray that the Lord would provide for our needs, that he would heal us when we get sick, that he would guide us and give us wisdom, that he would protect us and our loved ones, that he would help us honor and serve him.
  5. How often do we stop to thank the Lord for how he grants those requests?
  6. And what about the times when the Lord blesses us in ways that we did not even expect?
  7. Jacob's example reminds us of the importance of taking time to give thanks to the Lord.
- D. Jacob's decision to worship in this particular location also suggests that he wanted to inquire of the Lord before leaving the Promised Land for Egypt.

1. Remember the trouble that Abraham ran into when he went to Egypt to find relief during a time of famine.
2. He nearly lost his wife to Pharaoh.
3. It was only by God's direct intervention that that tragedy was prevented.
4. And a bit later in Genesis, when famine hit the land of Canaan in Isaac's day, the Lord appeared to Isaac and said, "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and will bless you, for to you and to your offspring I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham your father." (Gen. 26:2-3)
5. Jacob would have remembered this when he began to make plans to go to Egypt.
6. While he wanted to go to Egypt, both to escape the famine and to see the son whom he thought was dead, he did not go without seeking God's approval first.
7. He wanted to make sure that he was not just responding to his circumstances on the basis of his desires.
8. He wanted to make sure that he would not be giving up on God's promises if he left.
9. This teaches us that we should not look to circumstances alone to determine what we ought to do.
10. While our circumstances are ordered by God's providence, we need to remember that we are not infallible in our reading of providence.
11. We need to look to the Lord as our ultimate guide.

12. In Jacob's day, this involved inquiring of the Lord at the place where he had given special revelation in the past.
13. In our day, it means inquiring of the Lord by prayerfully looking to the revelation of his will in the Scriptures, as well as seeking the advice of mature believers who are guided by God's Word.

### III. Resting upon God's Promises

- A. The Lord responded to Jacob by coming to him in a vision and reaffirming his covenant promises to him.
  1. God said that he would make Jacob into a great nation and bring him back to the Promised Land.
  2. But there is also something new in what God says here.
  3. Earlier, he commanded Isaac not to go to Egypt.
  4. Here, he commands Jacob to do the exact opposite.
  5. He says, "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation."
  6. This was something that God had never said before.
  7. He had previously promised to make Israel into a great nation.
  8. And he had previously told Abraham that his descendants would be sojourners and servants in a land that was not their own for four hundred years.
  9. But he had never before said that he was going to use the latter in order to bring about the former.

10. He had never before revealed that he was going to build his church by sending the covenant people into exile.

B. God continues to work in the same way today.

1. He is building his church as it is scattered throughout the kingdoms of this world.
2. The church exists in a state of exile.
3. The New Testament emphasizes this on a number of occasions.
4. James refers to the church as “the twelve tribes in the Dispersion.” (Jas. 1:1)
5. Peter refers to the church as “elect exiles of the dispersion” (1 Pet. 1:1), and as “sojourners and exiles.” (1 Pet. 2:11)
6. Peter also refers to Rome as “Babylon” (1 Pet. 5:14), a name that was synonymous with exile for the people of God.
7. These passages underscore that God has not yet brought us into our inheritance.
8. We are his holy people, set apart to worship and serve him, but we are called to live in the midst of the cultures of this present age.
9. The Lord Jesus said as much when he prayed to his Father saying, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” (Jn. 17:15)
10. Likewise, the apostle Paul writes, “I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people — not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world.” (1 Cor. 5:9-10)

11. The Lord builds his church while we live in the midst of the peoples of this world, just as he built up the nation of Israel as they lived among the people of Egypt.
- C. God explicitly commanded Jacob to go to Egypt.
1. He sent the covenant people into exile.
  2. But he also gave Jacob a number of promises as he did so.
  3. First, as we have already noted, God told Jacob that he would make him into a great nation.
  4. Jacob's family was numbered at seventy when he entered Egypt.
  5. That might sound like a lot when we consider that God began with just one man, Abraham, just two generations before Jacob.
  6. Still, seventy does not measure up to what God had promised Abraham.
  7. It does not constitute anything like the stars in the sky or the sand on the seashore.
  8. But four hundred years later, at the time of the exodus, Israel would truly be a great nation.
  9. God made them so numerous that Pharaoh was threatened by them.
- D. God also told Jacob that he would go down with him to Egypt.
1. Even though God was commanding Jacob to sojourn outside the land that had earlier been identified as "the house of God," Jacob would not be cut off from the presence of the Lord.

2. God would continue to be with him.
  3. Notice the similarity this bears to what Jesus did just before he ascended back into heaven.
  4. Though his ascension separated him from his followers, he told them before he left them, "I am with you always."
  5. While we do live as exiles in a land that is not our own, our Lord has not abandoned us.
  6. He is always with us, just as he was with Jacob.
- E. God also promised Jacob that he would bring him back from Egypt.
1. The interesting thing about this is that Jacob did not return to the Promised Land in his lifetime.
  2. He died in Egypt.
  3. His sons did return to Canaan to bury him in the same cave in which Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, and Rebekah were buried.
  4. But God's promise to Jacob surely meant more than having his bones laid to rest in the Promised Land.
  5. After all, what comfort would that be?
  6. In telling Jacob that he would be brought back from Egypt, God was saying that Jacob would one day inherit the reality that the Promised Land signified.
  7. He would be raised to everlasting life and made fit for an eternity in the new Jerusalem.
- F. Lastly, God promised Jacob that Joseph would close his eyes.



1. Contrary to Jacob's earlier predictions, his head would not go down in sorrow to Sheol.
2. The Lord provided a great comfort to Jacob before he died.
3. He reunited him with his lost son, and he assured him that he would not be separated from that son again in this life.
4. His beloved son Joseph would be beside him when he died.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. The book of Genesis shows us that God does not fulfill his promises immediately.
  1. Abraham and Sarah had to wait twenty-five years before they finally had a son.
  2. Isaac had to wait twenty years before Jacob and Esau were born.
  3. Jacob had to endure twenty years in exile under the service of his scheming uncle Laban before returning to his father's household.
  4. After his return, he grieved over the apparent death of his favorite son Joseph for more than twenty years.
  5. And after Jacob brought his family to Egypt, the people of Israel would have to dwell in that land for four hundred years before being delivered from their bondage.
- B. God's timing is a mystery to us, which is why we have to walk by faith.
  1. This is what we see Jacob doing in this passage.
  2. His faith led him to inquire of the Lord rather than presume to be able to read God's providence in circumstances.

3. Then, as he rested on God's promises, he was able to display an attitude of grateful contentment when he was finally reunited with Joseph.
  4. Jacob was not bitter about all the lost years.
  5. Neither was he impatient over the fact that so many of God's promises were still awaiting fulfillment.
  6. He was ready to die in peace.
- C. Jacob learned the lesson that is expressed in a line from Psalm 84, in which the Lord is praised as the one who gives grace and glory to his people. (v. 11 KJV)
1. Grace is what God gives us now, in this life, to sustain us in our faith.
  2. As Charles Spurgeon notes, "The Lord may not give gold, but he will give grace: he may not give gain, but he will give grace. He will certainly send us trial, but he will give grace in proportion thereto."
  3. This is what we see the Lord doing in the life of Jacob.
  4. God's grace was sufficient for Jacob, and it will be sufficient for you as well.
  5. As for the promise of glory, we need to be content with the fact that glory is not for this life, but for the world to come.
  6. In Spurgeon's words, "We do not need glory yet, and we are not yet fit for it; but we shall have it in due order. After we have eaten the bread of grace, we shall drink the wine of glory." [*Cheque Book of the Bank of Faith*, March 19]