

## Father and Son

- Genesis 46:1-7, 28-34
- The list of the direct descendants of Jacob who moved from Canaan to Egypt is flanked on either side by two beautiful pictures of a father and a son. The first scene is God the Father putting his arms around Jacob, encouraging him to go on down to Egypt, that everything's going to be ok and he's not going alone. *I will be with you*, God says. The second scene at the end of the chapter is Jacob greeting his beloved son Joseph whom he hasn't seen in nearly 23 years, weeping on his neck for a long time with joyful gratitude. Let's look more closely at this passage under those two main points: God and Jacob, Jacob and Joseph. I think we can see ourselves in there, too.
- **God and Jacob (verses 1-7)**
- *So Israel took his journey with all that he had and came to Beersheba.* As Moses read these words hundreds of years later to the wilderness wanderers, they smiled at one another and nodded. Our forefather Jacob journeyed with all he had, too! But Jacob was not wandering, as he went straight to Beersheba where he would worship the Lord with a sacrifice before he continued to Egypt. Why Beersheba? It was where his grandfather had made a covenant with Abimelech, after which Abraham planted a "tree in Beersheba and called there on the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God." (Gen. 21:33). It was also Isaac's "chief center," according to Derek Kidner, and it was Isaac who named the place Beersheba after he had departed from another Abimelech because of disputes and found water for his flocks in this place. God appeared to him there and said, "I am the God of Abraham your father. Fear not, for I am with you..." (Gen. 26:24) Jacob has been to Beersheba before, but he comes back to this place, perhaps because he needs to hear from God where his father and grandfather had heard from God; he is afraid of going to Egypt. We are all afraid, and we all need to hear from God that he is with us. Praise God we don't need to travel to Beersheba or anywhere else besides the Word of God to hear that. Jesus said to his disciples before he ascended into heaven, "And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matt. 28:20)
- Look at the three-part sermon God speaks to Jacob after calling him in a vision, saying, "Jacob, Jacob." 1- Place to Stand: "I am God, the God of your father." In other words, the same God who led and cared for your father is leading and caring for you, Jacob. And for you and me, saints. 2- Present Command and Promise: "Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt." He knows and cares about our fears. He promises Jacob, "There I will make you into a great nation." (Gen. 12:2, same promise to Abraham). "I myself will go down with you to Egypt." Hey, saints, if God went with Jacob into Egypt, will he go with us to work tomorrow? To school? To the mission field across the ocean and the one that is our community? Yes! 3- Future promise: "...and I will also bring you up again, and Joseph's hand shall close your eyes." This is wonderful. The "you" has two referents. First it refers to the nation of Israel, of which God said to Abraham, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years." But they will come back to Canaan, God said. (Gen. 15:12-16). Second, "you" refers to Jacob. Hey, Jacob, one day you will leave Egypt. (What will have to happen for Jacob to leave Egypt? He will die. Joseph will close his eyes in death. And then Joseph will take Jacob back to Canaan and bury him with his fathers. We will see that in the last chapter.)
- In the strength of that sermon, that hug from God which Jacob would have shared the next morning with his family, the sons of Israel got all the wagons ready that Pharaoh had provided so they could ride in style. The wagons carried their children and wives, Jacob and all his offspring, their goods, everything they needed for the journey, and their livestock followed along as well. Jacob was the patriarch of a huge family, 70 in all which included Joseph and his two sons who were already in Egypt. That leads us to...
- **Jacob and Joseph (verses 28-34)**

- Again we see Judah out front, as he was sent by his father to go ahead of the wagon train and find the way to Goshen, the land that meant “draw near,” the land given to them by Pharaoh but prepared for them by God. It was a fertile land, great for crops and livestock. God prepared a place for his people, where they would live with security, fertility, and prosperity for the next 71 years or so that Joseph is alive. There are 70 of them now, this little nation of Israel tucked away in a foreign land. By the time they are driven out of Egypt after 430 years of bondage, their number will have grown to 3 million.
- Joseph went out to meet his father. He came out as the ruler of the land in an Egyptian chariot, but he wept openly and freely when he saw and embraced his father. The other brothers may have wept as well, we are not told. But they could not help but stand and watch with awe and wonder at this scene. A son reunited with his father after more than 22 years. A family, torn apart by lies and conspiracy, envy and selfish rage, now reunited. And this was so much more than a family reunion! It was a powerful testimony that none of God’s words will fail. When Solomon dedicated the temple, he prayed: “Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant.” (1 Kings 8:56) Not one word that God spoke to Abraham has failed.
- Jacob is so grateful to see his son that he had mourned for 22 years that he said, “Now let me die, since I have seen your face.” While Jacob thought his son was dead, he had no rest, but now that he knew Joseph was alive, he could die in peace.
- Joseph does not respond to that but gives instructions instead to his brothers. Who I would have to believe are all ears to whatever Joseph has to say now. 1- *I will tell Pharaoh you have come to me.* Joseph, number two man, is going to put in a good word to number one man. (Hey, isn’t it good to know somebody important? We all do. Jesus, the one who said, “Come to me.” And we did.) 2- *I will tell him you are shepherds* and have been doing it for years, and you brought your own herds with you. 3- *Listen, this is important! When Pharaoh asks what you do for a living, don’t make stuff up.* Don’t lie on your resume. Say this: “Your servants have been keeping livestock for years, just as our fathers before us.” Say it that way, brothers, because Egyptians really don’t like shepherds. To them, you guys stink. You know, I was reading about this, and it wasn’t the profession of tending animals that the Egyptians looked down on as much as the fact that these people lived outside, basically. The city dwellers looked down on the country folk and isn’t that still the way it is?! But not here, right?!
- Let me close with a story I know I have shared before, but it bears repeating. As I read about this encounter between God the Father and his son going to Egypt, and father and son reuniting in Egypt, I remembered the story of John Paton, a 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary to New Hebrides in the South Seas. One of 11 children, John would write in his autobiography years later that the most memorable impression from his childhood was his father’s prayers for his children as he went to what John called his father’s Sanctuary Closet daily. He wrote, “my soul would wander back to those early scenes, and shut itself up once again in that Sanctuary Closet, and, hearing still the echoes of those cries to God, would hurl back all doubt with the victorious appeal, “He walked with God, why may not I?” When John was leaving home in his early 20’s for Glasgow, Scotland, to divinity school, he recorded this scene:
- “My dear father walked with me the first six miles of the way. His counsels and tears and heavenly conversation on that parting journey are fresh in my heart as if it had been but yesterday; and tears are on my cheeks as freely now as then, whenever memory steals me away to the scene. For the last half mile or so we walked on together in almost unbroken silence - my father, as was often his custom, carrying hat in hand, while his long flowing yellow hair (then yellow, but in later years white as snow) streamed like a girl's down his shoulders. His lips kept moving in silent prayers for me; and his tears fell fast when our eyes met each other in looks for which all speech was vain! We halted on reaching the appointed parting place; he grasped my hand firmly for a minute in silence, and then solemnly and affectionately said: "God bless you, my son! Your father's God prosper you and keep you from all evil!"

Unable to say more, his lips kept moving in silent prayer; in tears we embraced, and parted. I ran off as fast as I could; and, when about to turn a corner in the road where he would lose sight of me, I looked back and saw him still standing with head uncovered where I had left him - gazing after me. Waving my hat to him, I rounded the corner and out of sight in an instant. But my heart was too full and sore to carry me further, so I darted into the side of the road and wept for a time. Then, rising up cautiously, I climbed the dike to see if he yet stood where I had left him; and just at that moment I caught a glimpse of him climbing the dike and looking out for me! He did not see me, and after he gazed eagerly in my direction for a while he got down, set his face toward home, and began to return - his head still uncovered, and his heart, I felt sure, still rising in prayers for me. I watched through blinding tears, till his form faded from my gaze; and then, hastening on my way, vowed deeply and oft, by the help of God, to live and act so as never to grieve or dishonor such a father and mother as he had given me."

- May God grant us as parents and grandparents to love like John Paton's parents loved him. And where we fail, or where we were failed by our parents, as none are perfect, may God give us grace to forget what lies behind and to press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus!
- What can we take away from this passage today? 1- God goes with us everywhere we go. That's a place to stand and a promise to believe. 2- None of God's words will fail. That's also a place to stand and a promise to believe! 3- Thank God for godly fathers and mothers and the influence they have to shape generations who follow.
- Prayer
- Communion (and choir!)
- Greet One Another