

Joseph – An Unlikely Temporary Savior of the World!

Genesis 46-47

*How an Unfailingly Good God
Makes Good on His Promise to Work for the Good
of His People so that through Them, He can Save the World*

Text: Gen 46:2-4; 50:19-21; Heb 11:20-22; Acts 7:9-14; Acts 13:17

Genesis 46:2–4 *And 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 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.”*

Genesis 50:19–21 *But Joseph said to them, “Do not fear, for am I in the place of God?²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.” Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.*

Hebrews 11:20–22 *By faith Isaac invoked future blessings on Jacob and Esau.²¹ By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.²² By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.*

Acts 7:9–14 *“And the patriarchs, jealous of Joseph, sold him into Egypt; but God was with him¹⁰ and rescued him out of all his afflictions and gave him favor and wisdom before Pharaoh, king of Egypt, who made him ruler over Egypt and over all his household.¹¹ Now there came a famine throughout all Egypt and Canaan, and great affliction, and our fathers could find no food.¹² But when Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent out our fathers on their first visit.¹³ And on the second visit Joseph made himself known to his brothers, and Joseph’s family became known to Pharaoh.¹⁴ And Joseph sent and summoned Jacob his father and all his kindred, seventy-five persons in all.*

Acts 13:17 *The God of this people Israel chose our fathers and made the people great during their stay in the land of Egypt, and with uplifted arm he led them out of it.*

Introduction:

This week and next week we are taking a brief break from our series in James to welcome back our college students and their families and to help us all get off to a strong start for this Fall.

However, the messages I intend to preach are not unrelated to what we have been learning from James about displaying a living faith that is whole hearted, single focused, and fully trusting in God and His Word.

Last Sunday, James pointed us to a curious and unexpected illustration of what this actually looks like when we are called to display this kind of faith in hard places and dark spaces. He pointed us to the illustration of a farmer who, after sowing the seed confidently, works faithfully and waits patiently and graciously for the coming rain.

In the text, this farmer illustrates how God intends for each of us to sow seeds of gospel grace in our own hard places and dark spaces of life. And what motivates our confident sowing, faithful laboring, and gracious waiting is the confidence we have in God's promise to send His "rain" – the Messiah.

But, what does this look like in real life? How does God use ordinary, everyday people to do extraordinary ministry? To answer these questions, we are going to look at the life of a faithful servant who God used to bring about an unexpected, marvelous salvation for his own people and for the world. That man is Joseph and the part of his story we are going to examine this morning is found in Genesis 46-47.

Since Moses is telling this story to Joseph's descendants some 430 years later, what he includes in the story and where he locates it is significant.

These chapters tell the part of the story where Israel/Jacob and his entire family leave the Land of Promise (Canaan) and relocate to Egypt at the invitation of Joseph and by the authority and blessing of Pharaoh.

As we start this morning, here are four important observations we need to keep in mind about these chapters. These chapters are ...

1. *Overwhelmingly Positive*

- Everything God allows to happen to His people is positive.
- All that His people do is positive.
- All that the Nations (Egypt) do toward God's People is positive.

2. *Surprisingly Paradoxical*

- There is an unexpected reversal of God's Promise to bring Abraham and his descendants into the Land of Promise. In Genesis 12, God commanded Abraham leave Ur and take his family to dwell in the Land of Promise (Canaan). Now God commands Israel/Jacob and his family to leave Canaan and go down to Egypt.
- By God's providence, Israel rises, grows, and prospers in Egypt so that by the end of these chapters, Israel owns their land and has much wealth. By that same Divine providence, Egypt and the Egyptians lose their land, their wealth, and their prosperity.
- Israel goes to Egypt to find deliverance from famine but in the end, an Israelite saves Egypt and her inhabitants from famine.

3. *Spiritually Monumental*

- The surprising move to Egypt is the next stage in God's plan for His people. God told Abraham to "*know for certain*" that his descendants would be "*sojourners*" (note how this term occurs in 47:4, 9) in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions" (Gen 15:13-16).
- The first stage of God's promise to Abraham is being fulfilled – his descendants will go and dwell in Egypt as sojourners.
- In Egypt, Israel will go from a small, nomadic family of feuding brothers to a massive, unified, and prosperous nation with immense wealth living distinct lives in a good place – Goshen.

4. Soteriologically Significant

- Joseph is presented as a temporary universal savior who delivers both Israel and Egypt from death by starvation.
- Judah points to the promised Savior who would save the world from sin by killing the serpent and receiving their penalty (46:28).

In these two chapters, Moses uses the events that happened to Jacob by means of Joseph's wisdom to teach their descendants:

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Moses unpacks this statement by calling attention to five massive truths about God revealed in the five scenes that make up these chapters.

I. Scene 1: An Unfailingly Good God Assures His People as He Unfolds His Plan (Gen 46:1-28)

A. Jacob's Doubt (46:1)

- Word has come to Jacob that Joseph is alive and well and, moreover, is ruling Egypt as Vizier to Pharaoh. And he has procured an invitation from Pharaoh for Jacob and his family to come and dwell in Egypt.
- However, Jacob also remembers the command God gave to his father, Isaac, forbidding him to go down to Egypt (Gen 26:2-5).
- So what is Jacob to make of these conflicting events? And more importantly how does he resolve them?
- He begins his journey by going to Beersheba near the place where God had first appeared to him in a dream and had promised: *"I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac. The land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring. ¹⁴ Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."* **Genesis 28:15**

B. God's Assurance (46:2-4)

God visits Jacob a second time in a vision and reiterated the same promise but with an interesting addition: *And 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 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." **Genesis 46:2-4***

1. I am the God of your father! Just as I preserved him and performed my word to him, I will also do for you!
2. Do not be afraid to go down for I will be with you in that place.
3. I am sending you there for good and not evil! Now is the time and Egypt is the place where I intend to fulfill my promise to Abraham and make his descendants into a great and large nation.
4. No matter how long I leave you there (430 years) or what I allow to happen to you there (Jacob, you will die in Egypt), I will not leave you there!

C. God's Faithfulness

1. His Faithfulness to His Covenant People (46:1, 5-7)
 - *So "Israel" took his journey with all that he had...*
 - Moses intentionally uses the covenant name "Israel" instead of "Jacob" at key points in this narrative:
 - 46:1** – *Israel* took his journey ...
 - 46:8** – *These are the names of the descendants of Israel who came into Egypt ...*
 - 47:27** – *Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen.*
 - 47:29** – *When the time drew near that Israel must die ...*
 - 47:34** – *Then Israel bowed himself upon the head of his bed.* (Note reference to Heb 11:21)
 - Jacob and all his descendants arrive in Egypt safely (46:5-7).
2. His Faithfulness to the Nations (46:8-26; Dt. 32:8)
 - 46:8-27 list the names of the 70 Israelites that came into Egypt and Moses seems to point the reader to this number.

- The reason for the emphasis on the number 70 in this text may be that Moses was pointing future generations back to this important reality when he revealed to them that the story of the nations was intrinsically interwoven with Israel's story because from the beginning God's plan involved the nations being dependent on Israel and not Israel on them. *Deuteronomy 32:8* When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he divided mankind, he fixed the borders of the peoples **according to the number of the sons of God.**

3. His Faithfulness to Jacob (46:29-31; 49:28-33; 50:1-14)

- God provided the choicest land in Egypt as a dwelling place for Jacob and his people (46:29-31).
- God promised Jacob that though he would die in Egypt, he would not remain in Egypt, but God would bring him back into the Land of promise (46:4).
- God fulfilled his promise and Jacob was buried with his fathers in the burying place of Abraham and Isaac (Gen 50:1-14).

II. Scene 2: *An Unfailingly Wise God Preserves the Physical Wellbeing and Spiritual Identity of His People (Gen 46:28-47:12)*

A. A Choice Place (46:28-31)

- By the providence of God and the wise words of Joseph, Pharaoh granted some of the choicest land in all of Egypt as a possession to Jacob and his people.
- The land of Goshen was well watered, fertile, and most importantly, far from the political and religious centers of Egypt.
- It was the perfect place for God to fulfill His promise to make Israel a large, prosperous, and mighty people.
- Note: There are large ruins in Goshen that indicate the presence of an exceedingly large Semitic people. There is a massive palace with 12 tombs designed after the Semitic burial practices rather than Egyptian burial practices. One of those tombs is large and ornate and has evidence that the

body interred there was removed carefully and intentionally as opposed to being desecrated by robbers. And finally, a large statue of an important Egyptian ruling official has been discovered there – with semitic features and wearing a multi-colored coat.

B. A Surprising Means (46:32-34)

- Joseph instructs his brother to make sure to tell Pharaoh they are shepherds and keepers of livestock.
- And the reason he wants them to tell Pharaoh their occupation is because the Egyptians loathe and despise shepherds (46:34).
- Why would Joseph do this? In order to insure that Pharaoh would cause them to dwell in their own land apart from the rest of the Egyptians! And this is exactly what happens!

C. A Wise Provision (47:1-6)

- Joseph's wise strategy worked.
- Pharaoh gladly authorized all of Israel to have the best of the land and dwell in the rich and fertile land of Goshen apart from the rest of Egypt.
- Additionally, he elevated them to official honored positions as the keepers of his herds.
- Finally, by dwelling apart from the Egyptians, Israel would avoid embracing the pagan idolatry of Egypt nor would they intermingle by marrying the pagan Egyptians.

D. A Temporary Place (47:4; 9)

- Notice how both Jacob and his sons refer to their coming to Egypt as a “sojourn.”
- In other words, they have not come to dwell in Egypt as permanent residents. From the beginning they know that however long their stay, it is not permanent. It is a sojourning until the time God would bring them back to Canaan and give them that land as their permanent possession!
- Egypt was not their home! It was just a temporary stopping place on the way to their permanent home.

III. Scene 3: An Indisputably Sovereign God Declares His Sovereignty over the Kings of the World (Gen 47:7-12)

- This scene records an amazing, unthinkable event that took place when Joseph presented Jacob to Pharaoh.
- This was an official event filled with great ceremony and significance.
- In Egypt, Pharaoh was not just the king, he was the living connection between the people and their gods. As such was considered to be a living god and the Lord of the land.
- When a foreign ambassador or ruler came into his presence, Pharaoh would issue the blessing. However, in this narrative, Jacob blesses Pharaoh ... twice! (v 7 and 10).
- Amazing! How is it that an unknown nomadic leader of a small band of people would even be granted an audience with Pharaoh much less bless him?
- Don't miss the significance of this moment. Jacob is actually addressing Pharaoh not as a grateful inferior or even as a peer but as someone greater than Pharaoh – he issued the blessing. And even more shockingly – Pharaoh received it!
- This blessing is not just a glorified ceremonial greeting – it represents the authority God gave Abraham to bless the nations of the earth (Gen 12:1-3). And it also fulfills God's promise to bless the nations that bless and serve Abraham's descendants.

IV. Scene 4: An Unfailingly Gracious God uses His Servants to Show His Mercy to the World (Gen 47:13-26).

- In the midst of a severe, devastating, and death-dealing global famine, God used Joseph to “save” Egypt and the World.
- In these verses the Egyptians were allowed to buy food (vv 13-19).
- When their money ran out, they were allowed to sell their livestock and then their land and themselves (vv. 16-19).
- So Joseph bought all the livestock, land, and people of Egypt for Pharaoh with the exception of the priests and the land on which their temples stood (vv. 20-22).

- BUT ... this arrangement contained an amazing measure of merciful grace – the people were allowed to live on their land, and they were allowed to keep 4/5 of whatever they produced and sold.
- No other nation and no other king had this generous arrangement.
- And Joseph protected the Egyptian people by making this arrangement a permanent, unbreakable statute in Egypt that endured up through the time of Moses (47:26).
- So Joseph saved the Egyptians and the world.
- Listen to their grateful statement to Joseph: And they said, ‘*You have saved our lives; may it please my lord, we will be servants to Pharaoh.*’ (47:25)

V. Scene 5: *An Unfailingly Faithful God Remains Faithful to His Covenant and His People (Gen 47:27-31).*

A. *Faithful to Prosper His People (47:27)*

Thus Israel settled in the land of Egypt, in the land of Goshen. And they gained possessions in it, and were fruitful and multiplied greatly.

- God caused His people to dwell in their own land while all of Egypt sold their land.
- God gave His people possessions and prosperity while all of Egypt sold their possessions, land, and even themselves.
- God made His people fruitful and multiplied them greatly!

B. *Faithful to Keep His Promise (47:27-31)*

- For 17 sweet years Jacob lived in Goshen with Jacob and his sons and grandsons.
- God had taken the self-inflicted pain, sorrow, and brokenness that marked Jacob’s life as he wrestled with God to manipulate God’s plan and obtain God’s blessing by his own human means – and turned those days of sorrow into joy and blessing!
- 17 years earlier God promised to go down to Egypt with Jacob, to be with him, to bless him, and to multiply his descendants. And God had kept his word!
- However, God had also promised to return Jacob to Canaan and now that time has come for Jacob to die, he remembers that promise! And he causes

Joseph to swear that he will not bury his father in Egypt but rather with his fathers, Abraham and Isaac!

- Why would an old man who spent the best years of his life in Egypt not want to be buried in a rich and well appointed Egyptian tomb? Why would he choose instead to be buried in a simple cave located on a tiny plot of land originally purchased by his grandfather, Abraham (Gen 23:4-20)?
- The answer is that this was the only portion of the Land of Promise that Abraham actually owned by right of purchase. He owned all of Canaan by right of Divine Promise but he physically owned a cave on a small field in Canaan by right of purchase. And Jacob wanted to be buried in his land and the land his fathers owned and not in the land where he was a sojourner!
- And so, that is exactly what Joseph did. When Jacob died, all of Israel and the high officials of Egypt went to Canaan and buried Jacob. And one day, Egypt will come again into Canaan, not to bury but to worship a future descendant of Jacob named Jesus!

Isaiah 19:19–25 In that day there will be an altar to the LORD in the midst of the land of Egypt, and a pillar to the LORD at its border. ²⁰ It will be a sign and a witness to the LORD of hosts in the land of Egypt. When they cry to the LORD because of oppressors, he will send them a savior and defender, and deliver them. ²¹ And the LORD will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians will know the LORD in that day and worship with sacrifice and offering, and they will make vows to the LORD and perform them. ²² And the LORD will strike Egypt, striking and healing, and they will return to the LORD, and he will listen to their pleas for mercy and heal them. ²³ In that day there will be a highway from Egypt to Assyria, and Assyria will come into Egypt, and Egypt into Assyria, and the Egyptians will worship with the Assyrians. ²⁴ In that day Israel will be the third with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth, ²⁵ whom the LORD of hosts has blessed, saying, “Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my inheritance.”

Conclusion: We have seen:

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But, there is one final lesson we need to make sure we don't miss.

Moses presents Joseph as a temporary universal savior who delivers both Israel and Egypt from death by starvation.

But a better Savior is coming who can offer a better salvation and he would not come from Joseph's line ... but from Judah!

Judah points to the promised Savior who would save the world from sin by killing the serpent and receiving their penalty (46:28).