

PILGRIMS PROGRESS

GENESIS 46:28-47:12 FEBRUARY 8, 2023

In November of 1620, forty-one travelers signed the Mayflower Compact. After a long journey and a few near-mutinies, the colonists agreed to work together, *“for our better ordering, and preservation...as shall be thought most...convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience.”*¹ John Carver helped write the compact and was the first to sign. He became the first governor of Plymouth colony, but only lived another 5 months before his death. 403 years later, the effects of their pilgrimage still ripple through human history.

After decades of failure and strife, our text shows God’s chosen family united. Circumstances and Providence have led them back into a life of pilgrimage. But what *kind* of pilgrims would they be? Would they act the way they did in Genesis 34 when they sojourned to Shechem, leaving a ghost town, soaked in blood? Or would they follow in the steps of faithful Abraham, the friend of God?

The Joseph saga is a great story of redemption. These sons of Jacob, who were some of the *worst* men, are transformed by God’s grace. As they once again take up the pilgrim’s progress, we see that instead of violence there is service. Instead of rivalry, there is humility. Instead of schemes there is honesty. Instead of greed, there is grace. And now - *finally* - even though they are outside the Land of Promise, they are able to *be* the blessing that God has always wanted this family to be.

Genesis 46:28a - ²⁸ Now Jacob had sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to prepare for his arrival at Goshen.

Goshen is in the North Eastern part of the Egypt.² The name is Hebrew, not Egyptian. And it refers to a place with rich soil.³ It would be an ideal spot to graze their flocks and herds.

At this point, Joseph has lived in Egypt longer than he did in Canaan.⁴ He was taken at age 17, it’s now about 22 years later. While he retains aspects of his Hebrew heritage, like his worship of the One True God, in many other ways he’s assimilated into Egyptian culture.

Judah continues to occupy a position of servant-leadership. Abraham had one son. Isaac had two. Now the family is much larger. As Jacob’s life comes to a close, the question is: Who is going to lead this group? Jacob would’ve chosen his favorite son, but he was thought dead for the last two decades. Even though they’re together again, it’s doubtful that Joseph would be allowed to leave his service to Pharaoh. Jacob’s firstborn of the family was disqualified. Plus, we’ve seen again and again that, in Genesis, God often has a different idea than simply going with the oldest. It was Abel, not Cain. It was Isaac, not Ishmael. It was Jacob, not Esau.

¹ <https://www.history.com/topics/colonial-america/mayflower-compact>

² *Dictionary of Biblical Languages With Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)*

³ *Faithlife Study Bible Notes*

⁴ Amy Chase *Selling Sojourn: Jacob In Egypt As Diaspora Discussion*

Judah has become to Jacob what Joseph became to Pharaoh. He's the Prime Minister of the family at this point. And, eventually, his line would not only be established as the royal line, but more importantly the Messianic line.

Genesis 46:28b-29 - When they came to the land of Goshen, ²⁹ Joseph hitched the horses to his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel. Joseph presented himself to him, threw his arms around him, and wept for a long time.

Hearing that his father had arrived, Joseph, the most important man in the most powerful kingdom, didn't wait for a servant to prep his chariot - he hitched the horses himself.

This would have been like a presidential motorcade. He probably had quite a few servants and runners surrounding him as he went.⁵ In fact, the language suggests how overwhelming his arrival was. Where it says there, "Joseph *presented* himself," the text is using a term that is always used elsewhere in Genesis for a Theophany - an appearance of God to man.⁶ Such was Joseph's power and grandeur and grace,⁷ riding in a vehicle that didn't exist in Canaan.⁸

As we move through the world, we're appointed as heavenly ambassadors. We're meant to operate on a whole different level when it comes to circumstances and worldview and decision-making. When we arrive on scene, hopefully we give an impression of God's grace and His provision and His power and His grandeur.

Genesis 46:30 - ³⁰ Then Israel said to Joseph, "I'm ready to die now because I have seen your face and you are still alive!"

Commentators point out that nearly all of Jacob's words after Genesis 37 have been about death. Often he said he was going to go down to the grave in sorrow. From 37 to 46, he wasn't particularly faith-filled or following after the Lord. Now he's back on his pilgrimage and we see that his attitude toward death has changed. Now he has peace he didn't have before. He's *ready* to die. Derek Kidner writes, "[Jacob's] bitterness is largely replaced by a sense of fulfillment and hope."⁹

Unless we are taken in the rapture, we are all headed to heaven through the tunnel of death. As pilgrims, we don't have to be *excited* about dying, but we trust our Lord. So, we can be ready for death. It's not a looming enemy, but a passageway from where we are to where we want to be.

After their long and emotional reunion, Joseph starts coaching his brothers on how to proceed.

Genesis 46:31-34 - ³¹ Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's family, "I will go up and inform Pharaoh, telling him, 'My brothers and my father's family, who were in the land of

⁵ R. Kent Hughes *Genesis: Beginning And Blessing*

⁶ Bruce Waltke *Genesis: A Commentary*

⁷ Gordon Wenham *Word Biblical Commentary Volume 2: Genesis 16-50*

⁸ Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

⁹ Derek Kidner *Genesis*

Canaan, have come to me. ³²The men are shepherds; they also raise livestock. They have brought their flocks and herds and all that they have.’ ³³When Pharaoh addresses you and asks, ‘What is your occupation?’ ³⁴you are to say, ‘Your servants, both we and our ancestors, have raised livestock from our youth until now.’ Then you will be allowed to settle in the land of Goshen, since all shepherds are detestable to Egyptians.”

So that’s how it’s going to be? We’re *detestable* to the people here? The answer is: Yes. This Hebrew family would never be accepted into Egyptian society *unless* they abandoned their God and their heritage and their calling and their special place in this world.

The truth is, they *needed* to be separate, and Joseph knew that. In Egypt, it was an abomination to sacrifice lambs or rams. To do so showed contempt for Amun, the king of the gods.¹⁰ Moses references this danger in Exodus 8:26. Egypt was the kind of place where they might impale you on a stick for not getting on board with their gods.¹¹ If you trespassed into an Egyptian funerary district and you weren’t a priest, you could be burned alive.¹² Egyptians did a lot of strange things. Did you know that when the family cat died, the Egyptians would shave off their eyebrows in mourning?¹³ They also saw feces as a sign of immortality and used it their medicines.

The family of faith was going to continue to worship God in the way He asked them to. Staying separate was not only good for their spiritual health, but also for their physical safety. Joseph’s plan to settle them in Goshen would mean they were on the outskirts of the kingdom and would be able to thrive away from the dangerous influence of Egyptian culture.

Joseph explains that the Egyptians wouldn’t think very highly of them. They’d be viewed as *other* - nomadic hayseeds who don’t do things right and have different priorities. And you know what, *that’s ok!* Believers *are* different. We do have a different way of doing things. We have much different priorities. We don’t want to assimilate into the dung-loving culture of this world.

At the same time, the family was happy to live at peace in Goshen. They weren’t trying to start trouble. They also weren’t hiding who they were. As Joseph instructs them what to say, he doesn’t tell them to lie. He encourages them to be honest, *even if* that makes Pharaoh wrinkle his nose at you.¹⁴ “Oh...you’re shepherds? You are monotheists? You don’t rub poop all over yourself? Gross!”

There’s a beautiful picture of Christ here. If Joseph wasn’t with them, if they were just one of the thousands of refugees coming in for help and they appeared before Pharaoh, would he have received them? He would’ve sent these country-mice packing. But they were *hidden* in Joseph, the savior, just as we are hidden in Christ, and are given a place at the table, a place in the kingdom.

¹⁰ <https://www.thetorah.com/article/sacrificing-a-lamb-in-egypt>

¹¹ Anthony Leahy *Death By Fire In Ancient Egypt*

¹² Kerry Muhlestein *Sacred Violence: When Ancient Egyptian Punishment was Dressed in Ritual Trappings*

¹³ <https://museumfacts.co.uk/weird-ancient-egyptians-facts/>

¹⁴ Waltke

Genesis 47:1 - So Joseph went and informed Pharaoh: "My father and my brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they own, have come from the land of Canaan and are now in the land of Goshen."

By referencing the flocks and herds, Joseph is laying the groundwork for his family to be able to live in a good grazing area and he's showing that they're not going to be an economic burden on Egypt.¹⁵ They're not going to leech off the palace, they're hardworking and industrious people.

We are pilgrims living in a foreign land. This world is not our home. As we navigate, we should endeavor to make ourselves a benefit, not a burden, to the society around us. We want to be peaches, not leeches - bearing fruit and making the place God has scattered us better.

Genesis 47:2 - ²He took five of his brothers and presented them to Pharaoh.

Joseph decided they didn't need all 11 brothers there. Historically, they haven't been the strongest group when it comes to meetings. I wonder how that schoolyard pick went!

Throughout this passage, Joseph is demonstrating what Jesus taught in Matthew 10: *"I'm sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be as shrewd as serpents and as innocent as doves."*

Genesis 47:3-4 - ³And Pharaoh asked his brothers, "What is your occupation?" They said to Pharaoh, "Your servants, both we and our ancestors, are shepherds." ⁴And they said to Pharaoh, "We have come to stay in the land for a while because there is no grazing land for your servants' sheep, since the famine in the land of Canaan has been severe. So now, please let your servants settle in the land of Goshen."

They didn't *exactly* say what Joseph had coached them to say.¹⁶ They mentioned Goshen themselves instead of letting Pharaoh offer it to them. And they used a word for "shepherds" that Joseph *seemed* to want them to avoid. But it worked out. Pharaoh didn't need much convincing.

We're not always going to say the exact right thing as spiritual pilgrims, but the Lord is with us and His grace is operating even when we don't execute perfectly. That's a great relief.

When they said "we have come to stay in the land" the brothers used a term for a *temporary* stay, but when they said "settle in the land" they used one that means a *long-term* settlement.¹⁷

As pilgrims, we are here for a long-term, temporary visit. God encourages us to settle down where He's called us, but to keep in mind that this is not our forever home. The brothers do a *great* job in their speech, revealing that they had no intention of becoming Egyptian, but they also weren't a threat to Pharaoh or his people. In fact, three times they identify themselves as servants. Essentially,

¹⁵ Andrew Steinmann *Genesis: An Introduction And Commentary*

¹⁶ See Hughes, Eugene Roop, Susan Brayford

¹⁷ Alter

they're telling Pharaoh that they can look after themselves, but they intend to be a blessing to the people around them too. And while they speak, they gave Pharaoh appropriate respect and honor, even though he was who he was. He wasn't their enemy, he was their neighbor.

Genesis 47:5-6 - ⁵Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, "Now that your father and brothers have come to you, ⁶the land of Egypt is open before you; settle your father and brothers in the best part of the land. They can live in the land of Goshen. If you know of any capable men among them, put them in charge of my livestock."

We have another foreshadow of Christ here. The son bridges the gap for those he loves. Because of his willingness, because of his sacrifice, strangers are able to be brought in and given the best of the kingdom. Then they are given positions in the king's court. Being in charge of the livestock would mean they were officers of the crown, enjoying protections not usually accorded to aliens.¹⁸

Genesis 47:7 - ⁷Joseph then brought his father Jacob and presented him to Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh.

Joseph pictures Christ again as he presents his weak father before the king. In Jude 24 we read, "Now to him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of his glory, without blemish and with great joy." This is what our Lord will do for you one day.

Jacob the pilgrim takes initiative here.¹⁹ He doesn't wait to bless Pharaoh. He is living out God's original call to Abraham in Genesis 12:3, "All the peoples on earth will be blessed through you."

Jacob understood that God's calling on his life put him on a completely different plane than the rest of humanity. *This was the great king who controlled the greatest empire on earth, but Jacob approached him as if Pharaoh was the inferior party who needed blessing - because he was!* Yes, Pharaoh had a *palace*, but Jacob had a *promise*.

Pharaoh keeps talking economically, but Jacob brings the Lord into the situation. Here's a lovely insight from one commentator: "*Members of the chosen family 'include within the circle of blessing even those who seem least in need of it' and who are going to be problems in the future.*"²⁰ That's grace! Jacob has not demonstrated a lot of grace in his story, but it's flowing through him here.

Eugene Roop reminds us that, "*Blessing is a royal, priestly responsibility.*"²¹ Wouldn't you know it, God has made us a royal priesthood, sent out to proclaim praises and conduct ourselves honorably in an unbelieving world, fearing God, loving others, and doing good works.

¹⁸ Nahum Sarna *Genesis*

¹⁹ Brian Alexander McKenzie *Jacob's Blessing on Pharaoh: An Interpretation of Genesis 46:31-47:26*

²⁰ John Goldingay *Genesis*

²¹ Eugene Roop *Genesis: Believers Church Bible Commentary*

Genesis 47:8-9 - ⁸Pharaoh said to Jacob, “How many years have you lived?” ⁹ Jacob said to Pharaoh, “My pilgrimage has lasted 130 years. My years have been few and hard, and they have not reached the years of my ancestors during their pilgrimages.”

In Egypt, the perfect age was 110 years.²² Here’s a man who had attained a life that was, from one perspective, more than they could ever hope for.²³ They saw Jacob and said, “You’ve got to tell me about your life.” Jacob’s response was honest. He said, “It’s not just about years, it’s about a pilgrimage. The years of this pilgrimage have been difficult.” Your version might use the word ‘evil,’ but that’s not what Jacob means to say. It refers to pain and difficulty and sorrow.²⁴ The truth is, Jacob had made things hard *for himself* when he failed to follow God or when he stumbled into greed or bitterness or scheming. He didn’t boast in Pharaoh’s presence, “Oh *ALL* Canaan belongs to me.” No, his answer revealed that human life isn’t about the treasures we hoard or the comforts we enjoy or the size of our pyramids. It is about a sojourn we take with the living God.

Genesis 47:10 - ¹⁰So Jacob blessed Pharaoh and departed from Pharaoh’s presence.

Gordon Wenham points out that Jacob, who previously had been the one to cheat and steal to get blessings was now more than willing to dole them out.

We may be outsiders, we may be weak, limping our way through life, but we are in a position to bless a lost and dying world. We bless by being full of grace. We bless by serving others. We bless with our testimonies of God’s faithfulness and by our prayers. We bless others by demonstrating that there’s more to life than this world. That it’s Spirit, not status. Faith, not fame.

Genesis 47:11-12 - ¹¹Then Joseph settled his father and brothers in the land of Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. ¹²And Joseph provided his father, his brothers, and all his father’s family with food for their dependents.

Joseph secured property and provision for them. This is an amazing testament to God’s grace toward us when we walk with Him. While all the world was hungry, they were full. While all Egypt was forfeiting their land to Pharaoh, Joseph’s family was receiving a permanent land holding from him.²⁵ While the world shriveled under famine, God’s people thrived and became a nation.

Pilgrimage with God leads to strength, provision, protection, and a permanent place in His Kingdom. It doesn’t matter what the rest of the world is doing or worshipping or what sorts of droughts or wars are raging. We’re God’s people. What kind of pilgrims will we be?

²² Jozef Vergote *Joseph en Egypte*

²³ McKenzie

²⁴ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*

²⁵ Goldingay