

Genesis 46:1-34

Jacob and the Family Emigrate

Last time we reached the summit of the Joseph narrative in Genesis. We saw that after tormenting and testing his brothers, Joseph had determined that their hearts had changed, and he revealed himself to them as the brother they thought they would never see again. He had embraced them, he had kissed them, and he had forgiven them. He then had offered the entire family the opportunity to relocate to Egypt and live off the best of the land. It was a generous and much needed offer, since the famine that had been the catalyst for Joseph's brothers coming to Egypt in the first place, would continue for another five years.

So with Pharaoh's approval, Joseph had given his brothers clothes, silver, and supplies for the journey back to Canaan. He had also given them a message. Tell my father, Joseph had commanded his brothers, that ⁹"God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me, do not delay. ¹⁰For you shall live in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near me, you and your children and your grandchildren, and your flocks and your herds and all that you have. ¹¹There I will also provide for you" (Genesis 45:9-11).

It was, perhaps, the most difficult message the brothers had ever had to give their father, since in doing so they were required to admit their guilt in selling Joseph into slavery. It seems, though, that Jacob had been so pleased to learn that his favorite son was alive, that he had overlooked their actions of some twenty years before. As Jacob, himself, had stated when he had finally believed the news, "it is enough; my son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die" (Genesis 45:28).

I am quite certain that Jacob packed quickly. Despite his advanced age, remember that he was 130 years old (Genesis 47:28), I am confident he moved about the family settlement organizing the departure, barking orders to every servant and family member he saw. While Joseph had promised that their needs would be met when they arrived in Egypt, they still had to consider what provisions might be required for the more than 250 mile journey from Canaan. Fortunately, despite the famine-ridden conditions of the land, Joseph had sent more than one ton of food and other supplies to meet their needs. And Pharaoh had provided wagons so the women would not have to walk. Soon, with their possessions packed and loaded onto the donkeys, and the animals herded into groups, the family was ready to emigrate.

The Journey to Egypt Begins

"So Israel set out with all that he had, and came to Beersheba, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac" (v. 1). Jacob and the family stopped for the night at the southern border of Canaan. It was likely a natural stopping place, giving everyone a chance to rest and the animals a chance to feed and water themselves. But Jacob also had another motive for pausing before he left Canaan and traveled to Egypt. Canaan was the land God had promised him.



Remember that long ago, “¹¹God had said to Jacob,
‘I am God Almighty;
Be fruitful and multiply;
A nation and a multitude of nations shall come from you,
And kings shall come from you.
¹²And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac,
I will give to you,
And I will give the land to your descendants after you” (Genesis 35:11-12).

Jacob knew that God had promised him and his descendants the land of Canaan. Canaan was to be their home. Jacob also knew that, unlike his grandfather, who also had left Canaan during a time of famine to go to Egypt, Jacob was not sojourning, he was emigrating. That is, Abraham went to Egypt for a brief time, planning to return to Canaan when the circumstances improved. Jacob knew that he was going to Egypt to live there permanently.

Beersheba had been the homesite of his father and grandfather. It was also where Jacob had begun his journey to Haran to find a wife. That is to say, this place had memories for Jacob, and he wanted to surround himself with them before departing forever to the land of Egypt. He wanted to worship his God one last time in his homeland. We cannot overlook the fact that Jacob was showing great wisdom here. He was about to act on a life-changing decision, and he wanted to be spiritually prepared for its consequences.

Scripture records that Abraham had worshipped at Beersheba (Genesis 21:33) and later, so had his son Isaac (Genesis 26:25). So, now this aging father, on his way to see his son, worshipped at the place where *his* father and grandfather had worshipped. We can wonder if Jacob had repaired the old altar he found there for the occasion. Perhaps, instead, he built his own. We must also recognize that, unlike other times in Jacob’s encounters with God, in this case he worshipped only. That is, Scripture makes no mention of any *quid pro quo* offer to God for worship in exchange for protection and a safe return, as he had done in the past (Genesis 28:18-22).

As he slept that night, Jacob had a vision.

“²God spoke to Israel in visions of the night and said, ‘Jacob, Jacob.’ And he said, ‘here I am.’
³Then He said, ‘I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴I will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also assuredly bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes” (v. 2-4).

Jacob recognized the voice of his God. He had heard Him before, as we know (Genesis 28:10-16, 32:24-32). The calling of Jacob by name reminds the reader of God’s call to Abraham when He told him to go sacrifice Isaac (Genesis 22:1). Such a specific call would also be repeated when God introduced Himself to Moses (Exodus 3:4). It had, however, been many years since Scripture recorded such a conversation between Jacob and his God. In fact, the last such moment when God revealed Himself to Jacob was just before Rachel gave birth to Benjamin (Genesis 35:9-12). More than thirty years had passed since then, though that does not mean that God never spoke to Jacob in the intervening years. It is simply that Scripture makes no mention of any such revelation.

God used this opportunity to remind Jacob of Who He was and of what He had promised. He was “God, the God of your father” (v. 3). This was the same language God had used in introducing Himself to Isaac (Genesis 26:24). And as with Isaac (Genesis 26:24) and with Abraham (Genesis 15:1), God told Jacob to “not be afraid” (v. 3). We must remember that these patriarchs lived a precarious existence. They were constantly sojourning in a land where they, blessed as they were by God Almighty, were never the dominant people group. Even now, some 200 years after God first promised Abraham that He would make him a great nation, these Hebrews numbered probably less than 100 people.

God knew Jacob was afraid. God knew Jacob was hesitant. When he was first told that Joseph was alive, Jacob had shown no hesitation in pulling up the family roots and going to Egypt. But now, it seems, as he was about to leave the familiar lands of Canaan, Jacob was having second thoughts. It may have been that Jacob was afraid because he remembered the story his grandfather, Abraham, told him of a promise that he had received regarding a foreign land, when “God said to Abram, ‘know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years’” (Genesis 15:13). He likely also recalled the prohibition of leaving Canaan that his father, Isaac, had been given (Genesis 26:2). And his twenty years among the family of Laban was not likely to have produced in Jacob a great desire to live among foreigners. No doubt all of these concerns prompted God to reassure Jacob that he need not fear going to Egypt, for God would “make you into a great nation there” (v. 3). Here, for the first time, the promise of progeny is linked to a land other than the promised land of Canaan.

To further reassure Jacob, God promised His presence. “I will go down with you to Egypt” (v. 4), He declared. God promised Jacob that He would accompany him on the journey. And to further comfort Jacob, God revealed to him the promise that this difficult journey would not be in vain. God told Jacob that “I will also assuredly bring you up again; and Joseph will close your eyes” (v. 4). Jacob would see Joseph before he died. In fact, the language used meant that God promised Jacob that Joseph would be at his side when he died. And one day, Jacob’s body would return to the family burial tomb in Canaan (Genesis 50:12-14). We must also note that when God promised that ‘I will also assuredly bring you up again’ (v. 4), he was not telling Jacob a lie. The ‘you’ who was to be brought up out of Egypt was God’s people, Jacob’s descendants.

Upon awakening in the morning, Jacob, reassured by the promises of God, ordered the family to move on. He was undeterred by the knowledge that his life would end in Egypt. Indeed, it is more likely that he was praising God for the promises that he would survive the journey and see Joseph again.

“⁵Jacob left Beersheba, and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob and their little ones and their wives in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to carry him. ⁶They also took their livestock and their possessions, which they had acquired in the land of Canaan, and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his descendants with him: ⁷his sons and his grandsons with him, his daughters and his granddaughters, and all his descendants he brought with him to Egypt” (v. 5-7).

That Scripture mentioned that the “sons of Israel carried their father” (v. 5) is a poignant commentary on Jacob’s fragility. Again, at 130 years of age, this was a physically tortuous undertaking. Traveling more than 250 miles, in a wagon bumping along the uneven paths of the desert, must have been very uncomfortable to say the least. Yet, Jacob moved the family onward.

And Scripture also emphasizes the drastic and comprehensive nature of this relocation. All “their livestock and possessions . . . and all his descendants” (v. 6) made the journey. Despite being assured that they would be provided for from the best of the land of Egypt, it seems that Jacob and the family left nothing of value behind. This is not surprising for such peripatetic peoples as the shepherding Hebrews. Most people such as these possessed wealth that was portable.

Curiously, while the text specifically mentions his sons, grandsons, daughters, and granddaughters, no mention is made of either his wife, Leah, or his concubines Bilhah and Zilpah. We might presume that they had died in Canaan, or perhaps they are no longer essential to the story and were encompassed by the inclusiveness of the word all.

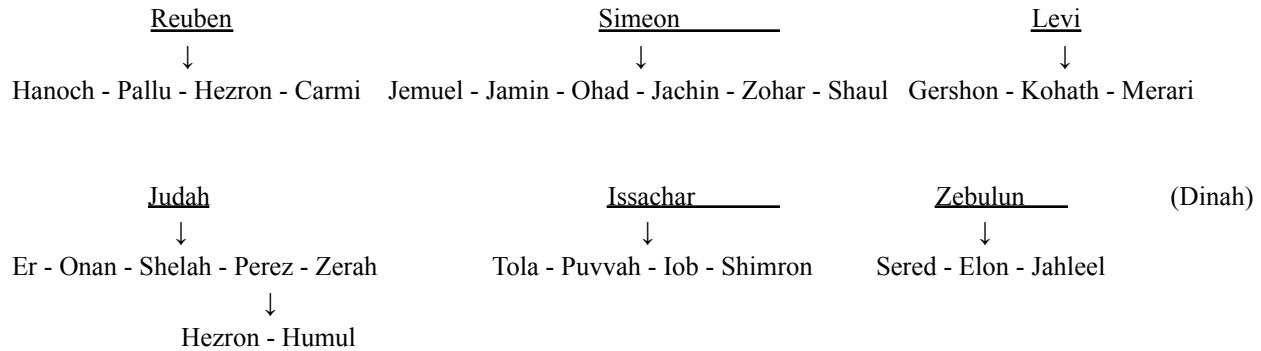
The Family of Jacob

Scripture then turns to a list of those who made the arduous, but life-saving, journey to Egypt. The narrative is similar to the other genealogies which we have encountered in Genesis, and begins with the familiar phrasing, “these are the names of . . .” (v. 8). The structure of this narrative groups the descendants of Jacob according to his respective wives. So, the descendants of Jacob through Leah are listed in verses 8-15. Then those of her servant Zilpah are found in verses 16-18. Those of Rachel are catalogued in verses 19-22. Finally those of Rachel’s servant Bilhah are recorded in verses 23-25. It is significant, though, that only Rachel is referred to as Joseph’s wife (v. 19).

The descendants through Leah

“⁸Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who went to Egypt, Jacob and his sons: Reuben, Jacob’s firstborn. ⁹And the sons of Reuben: Hanoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰And the sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹And the sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹²And 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. ¹³And the sons of Issachar: Tola, Puvvah, Iob, and Shimron. ¹⁴And the sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. ¹⁵These are the sons of Leah, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, with his daughter Dinah; all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three” (v. 8-15).

Jacob and Leah had the most prolific of the marital relationships enjoyed by this particular patriarch. Scripture records six sons and one daughter born to Jacob through Leah. In addition, there are twenty-five grandsons. Of those who made the journey to Egypt, however, we must exclude both Er and Onan, since God had taken their lives in Canaan because they had committed “evil in the sight of the Lord” (Genesis 38:7, 10). Finally, two great-grandsons are mentioned. That would leave the number of Jacob’s descendants through Leah at thirty-four. Thus the statement that “all his sons and his daughters numbered thirty-three” (v. 15) seems inaccurate. Perhaps the best way to make sense of this is to conclude that Dinah was not included in the count since she was female and not able to father a clan bearing her name, as Jacob’s male offspring could.



The names are listed in birth order, with Reuben being named first. Of his descendants, the most notable were Dathan and Abiram, who opposed Moses and Aaron in the group with Korah and were destroyed by God (Numbers 26:8-10). Another infamous descendant was Achan, who took the things designated for destruction after the sack of Jericho and was stoned by the people at Joshua’s command (Joshua 7:24-25).

We can see that Simeon followed the misguided practice of his younger brother, Judah, and married a pagan. His son Shaul was “the son of a Canaanite woman” (v. 10).

The sons of Levi became the three clans that cared for the sanctuary (Numbers 26:57). Also, Kohath was the grandfather of Moses.

Of the families descended from Judah, remember that Shelah was the son whom Judah withheld from Tamar, resulting in that sordid affair. Perez, one of the two sons born of that incident, became the father of David (Ruth 4:18-22), and was an ancestor of the Messianic line (Luke 3:33).

Of Issachar’s offspring, Tola was the ancestor of great warriors who served David, “the sons of Tola were valiant warriors in their generations. Their number in the days of David was 22,600” (1 Chronicles 7:2). Shimron was the name of a Canaanite city, and that means either that he may have been born there or that he had been born of a woman who lived there.

That Dinah is mentioned (there must have been other, unnamed daughters who had married and thus were not living at the family settlement) was a reminder of the troubles involving Shechem and the rift caused between Jacob and his sons when they retaliated.

The descendants through Zilpah

“¹⁶And the sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷And the sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. And the sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel.

¹⁸These are the sons of Zilpah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah; and she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons” (v. 16-18).

Through Zilpah, Jacob obtained sixteen descendants. These included two sons, eleven grandsons, one granddaughter, and two great-grandsons. As Scripture states, “she bore to Jacob these sixteen persons” (v. 18).

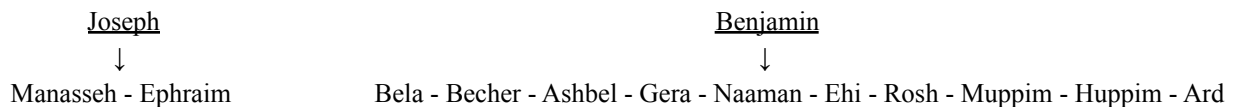


Leah’s servant Zilpah was the second most productive sexual partner for Jacob. Though she had only two sons, each of them produced numerous offspring. Also mentioned is another daughter, Serah, though there is no reason why her name is placed in Scripture along with Dinah, of all the daughters born to Jacob.

The descendants through Rachel

“¹⁹The sons of Jacob’s wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰Now to Joseph in the land of Egypt were born Manasseh and Ephraim, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, bore to him. ²¹And the sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²²These are the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; there were fourteen persons in all” (v. 19-22).

As mentioned earlier, Rachel was the only one of the women referred to as Jacob’s wife (v. 19). His beloved Rachel provided Jacob with fourteen descendants. These were the two sons, Joseph and Benjamin, and twelve grandsons. So “the sons of Rachel, who were born to Jacob; there were fourteen persons in all” (v. 22).

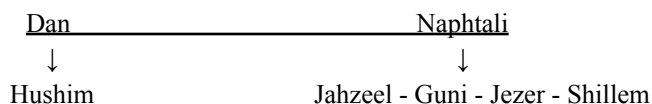


Benjamin, it seems, rivaled his father in the ability to produce male heirs. And again we are reminded that Joseph had an Egyptian wife, “Asenath, the daughter of Potiphera, priest of On” (v. 20).

The descendants through Bilhah

“²³And the sons of Dan: Hushim ²⁴And the sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵These are the sons of Bilhah, whom Laban gave to his daughter Rachel, and she bore these to Jacob; there were seven persons in all” (v. 24-25).

Finally, we see that Jacob had seven descendants through Bilhah, two sons and five grandsons. Thus Bilhah “bore these to Jacob; there were seven persons in all” (v. 24).



	<u>Sons</u>	<u>Daughters</u>	<u>Grandsons</u>	<u>Granddaughters</u>	<u>Great-grandsons</u>	<u>Total</u>
Leah	6	1	25	0	2	34
Zilpah	2	0	11	1	2	16
Rachel	2	0	12	0	0	14
Bilhah	2	0	5	0	0	7
Total	12	1	53	1	4	71

To summarize then, Jacob had twelve sons, one (named) daughter, fifty-three grandsons, one (named) granddaughter, and four great-grandsons. Notice that his wives produced forty-eight of the descendants and the concubines twenty-three. Dan was the least prolific of Jacob's sons, with only one male heir mentioned at the time of the emigration. Benjamin, as we have said, was the most blessed, with ten living sons. Only with Judah and Asher had the family line extended to the fourth generation at the time of the relocation to Egypt. The lack of the mention of females in the line, does not indicate any particular genetic issues, but rather that in these patriarchal societies women were simply not as significant as men.

Scripture states that ²⁶“all the people belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt, his direct descendants, not including the wives of Jacob's sons, were sixty-six persons in all, ²⁷and the sons of Joseph, who were born to him in Egypt, were two; all the people of the house of Jacob, who came to Egypt, were seventy” (v. 26-27).

At this time, Jacob had seventy-one descendants, but two of his grandsons (Er and Onan) had died and his son Joseph lived in Egypt with his sons Manasseh and Ephraim. Thus the sixty-six people (not counting his son's wives) who traveled with Jacob to Egypt are easy to discover. They included his sons, grandsons, granddaughters, and great-grandsons, excepting the deceased Er and Onan as well as Joseph and his sons Manasseh and Ephraim, then living in Egypt. That leaves sixty-five people in the family that moved from Canaan, so we must count Dinah, or perhaps Jacob himself, to make the sixty-six recorded in Scripture.

In dealing with this narrative, though, several interpretations have been offered to account for the number seventy, mentioned as being “of the house of Jacob” (v. 27). One is to understand the number seventy as symbolic of the community as a whole and not a literal census. For example, in the Table of Nations recorded in Genesis 10:1-32, seventy different nations are listed, and thus Jacob can be seen as representative of the “nations of the world” that God would bless. But since the sacred author has already specifically listed sixty-six, a number not given to symbolic meaning, as the number making their way to Egypt from the homeland, it is best to conclude that the count of people was meant to be genuine.

To discover who the four persons were that were considered a part of Jacob's house that did not make the trek to Egypt, many suggestions have been made. Obviously Joseph, Manasseh and Ephraim are counted as three, but that does leave the fourth. Some have suggested that this was either Dinah, or Jacob, whichever was not counted among the sixty-six. A more imaginative suggestion is that God was intended to be the seventieth person, since He had promised “I will go down with you to Egypt” (v.4). It is a detail worth pondering, perhaps, but it does not change the basic point of the narrative that God would keep His promise to these several dozen people and produce from them a great nation through whom all the families of the earth would be blessed.

Joseph and Jacob are Reunited

After some time, the family caravan neared their destination. So “Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph, to guide him to Goshen; and they came into the land of Goshen” (v. 28). This is ironic, since it was Judah who had played such a prominent role in the separation of Joseph and Jacob by advocating Joseph’s sale into slavery (Genesis 36:25-28). But Judah had changed. He had advocated for Benjamin, and now he led the family into Egypt.

Upon receiving Judah’s news that the family had arrived, “²⁹Joseph prepared his chariot and went up to Goshen to meet his father Israel; as soon as he appeared to him, Joseph threw himself on his neck and wept on his neck a long time. ³⁰Then Israel said to Joseph, ‘now let me die, since I have seen your face, that you are still alive’” (v. 29-30). The language suggests that Joseph, himself, made his chariot ready to travel, indicating that in his haste to see his father, he did not even take the time to order a servant to perform the task.

Joseph was so eager to meet his father that he went to meet him. He did not need to impress his father with his palace and position in Egypt. He just wanted to see him, to hold him, to weep with him. The climax of the episode is recorded only briefly in Scripture. The scene when Joseph and Jacob meet is too intimate and profound for an abundance of words. They must have seen one another at a distance, as Joseph came hurriedly in his chariot. As they embraced, Joseph wept passionately. Jacob was simply complete. The gaping wound left by the loss of his favorite son so many years ago had been filled.

But Jacob, though an old man, was not about to die. Though he had said “I will go and see him before I die” (Genesis 45:28), in fact, Jacob lived another seventeen years in Egypt (Genesis 47:28). As God would have it, Jacob had seventeen years with Joseph before he was taken. Now God gave him seventeen years with him at the end of his life.

When they had spent themselves emotionally, and likely talked about so many things that had happened in the past twenty years. Joseph prepared his father for his meeting with Pharaoh. He wanted to be certain this encounter was perfectly choreographed so there would be no misunderstandings. He wanted every diplomatic protocol to be followed so Pharaoh would not change his mind about the generous offer of settlement.

“³¹But 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; ³²and 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.” ³³When Pharaoh calls for you and says, “what is your occupation?” ³⁴you shall say, “your servants have been keepers of livestock since our youth even until now, both we and our fathers,” so that you may live in the land of Goshen; for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians’” (v. 31-34).

First, Joseph wanted to let Pharaoh know that his orders had been acted upon, and that his family had arrived. He also wanted to emphasize the fact that his family “are shepherds, for they have been keepers of livestock” (v. 32), so that news would not become a problem later. Though there is no historical evidence that Egyptians loathed all shepherds, they were a more urban people than the Hebrews and like

all societies of the ancient world, they were wary of outsiders. Joseph wanted his family to be completely honest with Pharaoh. This is ironic in that this family had struggled to be honest even with each other. Joseph knew that, and he wanted no misrepresentation on the part of his family.

That “they have brought their flocks and their herds and all that they have” (v. 32) was a hint that they would need a significant amount of land for them to live comfortably. Finally, the fact that Jacob was to tell Pharaoh that “your servants have been keepers of livestock since our youth even until now, both we and our fathers” (v. 34) would ensure that Pharaoh would not view these immigrants as potential threats. This was not a family of kings or warriors. They were humble shepherds, invited to live off the best of the land, by Pharaoh, himself.

Takeaways

With the many details of this narrative, it would be easy to overlook that moment in the beginning of the family journey to Egypt where Jacob worshipped his God. We cannot overstate the importance of Jacob worshipping at Beersheba. Jacob had learned to trust God. He had seen God work in his life on countless occasions, and he knew that his God was a God Who would keep His promises.

Yet all of those promises - land, seed, blessings, presence, had always been centered on Canaan. That was the land to which his grandfather, Abraham, had been led. It was the land which his father, Isaac, had been forbidden to leave. Now Jacob was taking his entire family - family to the fourth generation - and migrating permanently to Egypt.

But Jacob knew that this was the correct decision. He knew that this was God’s will. As incongruous as it seemed to his limited human capacity, Jacob knew that this was what God intended. So to affirm that, and to embolden himself, he took time to worship. It is a wonderful example for us to follow as we make life decisions. We ought to pause at each step along the way of our journey here and come to God in prayer and fellowship. We must be certain that as we go along life’s path that we can hear God’s voice saying “I will go with you” (v. 4).