



Jones, 1868

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Gen. 46.29

Family Reunion

Vienna Presbyterian Church
The Rev. Dr. Peter G. James
Genesis 46:26-34

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Lee Soon-Kye and Oh In-See were married in Korea in 1950. Soon thereafter, Oh was pregnant with their first child. Then, the Korean War erupted. Lee was swept into the conflict and ended up in the North. Oh fled south to the safety of family. When the war ended in 1953, Korea was divided into what survives to this day as North Korea and South Korea. Lee ended up living in North Korea and Oh in South Korea. They were forbidden to see each other, call or exchange letters.

North Korea agreed last month to allow 100 people from South Korea to visit North Korean family members for 12 hours. These family members had been separated for six decades. Lee and Oh were chosen by lottery to attend the reunion. Imagine, meeting each other for the first time after 65 years apart. Lee met his 64-year-old son for the first time. There was, as you can imagine, much hugging and weeping.

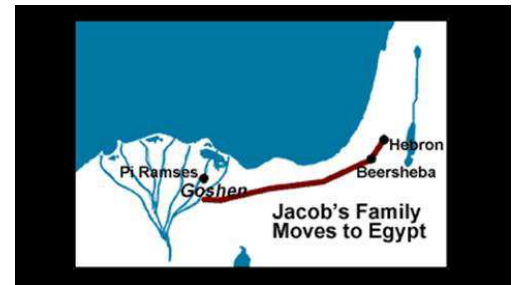
Today's Scripture tells the story of another such family reunion. Last Sunday, we recounted the reunion of Joseph and his 11 brothers after a 22-year separation. We come now to a second reunion between father Jacob and his long lost son Joseph.

The brothers carry the stunning news to their unsuspecting father, "Joseph is still alive; in fact, he is ruler over all Egypt" (45:26). Their words qualify as one of those too good to be true moments. Jacob resolves in his old age to make the trek to see his son before he dies.

Our narrator provides a list of those who make the trip. Jacob's 11 sons, 53 grandsons, one granddaughter and four great-grandsons will accompany him on the journey. If you

add Jacob to the mix, there are 70 people total that travel to Egypt.

They journey to Beersheba where Jacob stops to offer sacrifice (46:1). It's the same place his father, Isaac, gave a free-will offering a generation ago (Genesis 26:25). When we are grateful, generosity follows.



As this family caravan approaches Egypt, Jacob sends Judah ahead for directions (46:28). I observe two things from this little tidbit. First, the mantle of leadership among the 11 brothers has now fallen to Judah. Second, this is one of the few times in recorded history where a man stops to ask for directions.

Joseph eagerly awaits their arrival in Egypt. When he hears of their approach, he mounts his chariot to meet them. Their reunion is emotional: “Joseph throws his arms around his father and weeps for a long time” (46:29). Few words are exchanged, only weeping. What do you say to each other after a 22-year hiatus? Later in the chapter, the family makes plans to settle in Goshen, an area in Egypt most suitable for shepherds.

I've had a lot of time to think about why this Joseph story is the longest continuous narrative in Scripture. Here's what I've decided. This Joseph story is a gateway into the Old Testament. Think about it. Our story commences with Jacob and his 12 sons. But by this time in our story, it has evolved into an account of people who are about to coalesce into a nation called Israel. The Old Testament won't make much sense without a basic understanding of how Israel factors into the story of the Bible.

The name God gives Jacob before this story begins is telling. God says, “Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel” (Genesis 35:10). Israel is a name that means “God prevails.”

You will be for me a kingdom of
priests and a holy nation.

Ex. 19:6

People are often given new names in Scripture to match their new identity and mission. Joseph and his progeny are given a mission: “You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:6). God calls this family and this embryonic nation to proclaim God’s salvation to the world. The Old Testament chronicles the extent to which Israel succeeds and, ultimately, fails in this mission.

There’s a second reason why this Joseph story functions as a gateway into Scripture. It centers on Judah, the 4th born son of Jacob. Judah fares poorly at the outset of our story. He masterminds the plot to sell Joseph into slavery (Genesis 36:26). I avoided telling you of Judah’s tryst with a prostitute who turns out to be his daughter-in-law (Genesis 38). Let’s be clear. No one comes off very well in this messy story.

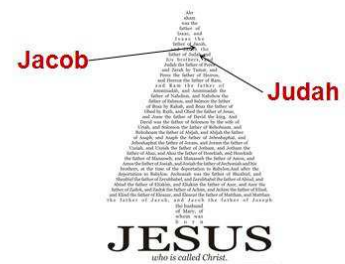
Judah, however, takes advantage of second chances. God gives people plenty of do-over opportunities in Scripture and Judah makes the most of it. He’s the one, as I said last Sunday, who offers his life in exchange for Benjamin. His voluntary act of self-sacrifice is what sets into motion this reconciliation in their family.

Jacob blesses his 12 sons before he dies in Genesis 49. He pronounces over Judah the most remarkable blessing. “Judah, your brothers will praise you....Your father’s sons will bow down to you. You are a lion....Who would dare

mess with you? The scepter will not leave your throne” (Genesis 49:8-10).

Judah becomes the premier tribe of Israel. Of the 12 tribes that evolve from these 12 sons, ten tribes are defeated and assimilated into the Babylonian Empire. Of the two tribes remaining, Judah predominates. Old Testament Israel becomes, in essence, the tribe of Judah.

The New Testament begins with a genealogy. Genealogies are important in the Bible. Matthew’s gospel opens with Jesus’ genealogy which originates from the lineage of Judah.



One of the names given to Jesus in the New Testament is Lion of Judah.

Now fast forward into the last book of the Bible, Revelation. No one is able to open the scroll to unlock the future and usher in the coming kingdom of God. No one in the great theophany in heaven can open the scroll. Then a messenger declares, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals” (Revelation 5:5).

Jesus offers his life in a voluntary act of self-surrender. He is the ideal descendent from Judah’s lineage. He is the great Lion of Judah who triumphs over sin and death.

So what difference does this sermon make in my life? Let’s go back to what God says to Jacob in Genesis 46. Incidentally, since this is the first time God speaks in the whole Joseph story, we’d better listen up. It must be really important!

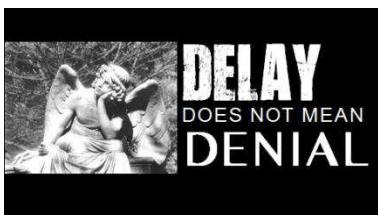
God makes what amounts to four promises to Jacob. 1. I am the God of your father. 2. Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt. 3. I will go with you. 4. I will make you into a great nation" (Genesis 46:3). These are the same promises God made to his father, Isaac, and his grandfather Abraham.

I wonder how Jacob interpreted these promises given what God was calling him to do. Let me see if I get this right, God. You called my grandparents to leave their home in Ur to settle in the land of Canaan. My dad and mom met and settled down there. This land was promised to us. Now, you're telling me to leave and go to Egypt. I don't want to say too much but this isn't the way I figured it would play out.

God is saying, in essence, you've got to trust me, Jacob. I know what I'm doing. I keep my promises. I know it doesn't fit your timetable. Trust me in this!

We want God's promises now. Waiting has never been our strong suit.

Habakkuk struggles with the vexing problem of what to do when God's promises seem to languish. The prophet is told by God, "The revelation waits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false. Though it lingers, wait for it; it will certainly come and will not delay" (Habakkuk 2:2). If God's promises seem slow in coming, wait for them.



I came across a line from a 1692 sermon by Thomas Watson that caught my eye: "The Lord may sometimes delay a promise, but he will not deny." I like that! God's promises may be delayed, but they will not be denied. Sometimes we have to wait until the fullness of time for God's promises to come to pass in our lives.

The four promises made to Jacob are still in play in our day, with the exception of the last one. I don't imagine God has plans to make you into a great nation, although I could be wrong about this. I'm convinced God has big plans for our lives if we will only be open and obedient to it.

1. ***I am God***; there is no other. All other deities to whom we give worship are worthless to save. God alone have the power to save and redeem.

2. ***Don't be afraid***. I've said many times that doubt is not faith's opposite. The antonym for faith is fear. Fear is what immobilizes people. Anxiety cuts a channel away from our hearts that drains our energies. Replace fear with faith.

3. ***I'll go with you***. The most prevalent and persistent promise of Scripture is God's promise to go with us. God says, "I'll never leave or forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5). Jesus said, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the close of the age" (Matthew 28:20). We are never alone. No matter what we face and what we are going through, God, in the person of Jesus Christ, promises to go with us.

4. ***I'll make you prosper***. I find myself returning time and again to the promise God gives to Jeremiah: "I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future" (29:11-12).

I'm inviting you today to trust God for your life. The Psalmist is flat-out honest to admit that all other human help is worthless (60:11). God alone has the power to save.

God sent Jesus Christ to be a great Lion of Judah. He has triumphed over



sin and death. God demands justice for sin and Jesus is the great Lion of Judah who pays the price. In the cross, there is both justice for sin and grace for sinners like us.

If you are ready to express to God that you are willing to trust Christ for your salvation, I invite you to stand during our closing prayer. Let your standing express to Jesus your resolve to follow Christ with your life.

Prayer: Gracious God, you are God; no other deity has the power to redeem and save. I'm letting go of the hold anxiety has over my life. I trust that you have good and gracious purposes for my life. I acknowledge Jesus Christ as my Savior for sin and endeavor from this moment forward to follow him as Lord of my life. I am confident that you go with me into the future. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

God's Forever Promises:

- 1. I am God**
- 2. Don't be afraid**
- 3. I'll go with you**
- 4. I'll prosper you**