

Parashah Forty-Two

Genesis 44:18–46:27; Joshua 14:6–15; Luke 24:13–27

Notes by Tim Hegg

Joseph's Self-Revelation

The Joseph story thus far has masterfully raised the narrative tension to a breaking point. The hidden identity of Joseph has worked to bring about his desired plan: Benjamin has come to Egypt, assuring Joseph that his father Jacob would also come. Joseph's plan to save his family from the famine would now be a reality, and so it was time to make known what was hidden.

It is the speech of Judah that finally brings the narrative resolution. Throughout Judah's appeal, the emphasis is put upon the welfare of Jacob. Judah relates that taking Benjamin from his father would cause him grievous concern, and that it was only possible when Judah himself became surety for his brother. Judah also speaks of how Joseph's demise was heart-wrenching for his father, and finally, if Benjamin did not return, surely Jacob would die a sorrowful death. Judah is therefore willing to stand as Benjamin's substitute, and begs Joseph to take him instead of Benjamin. Throughout his speech, the welfare of Jacob is the primary focus.

All of this is simply too much for Joseph. He cannot bear to hear that grief upon grief would be added to Jacob, and he decides it is time to reveal his true identity. In the most tender recognition of his family ties, he commands all the Egyptians to leave the room, and he is left alone with his brothers. Here, at long last, his brothers will know the truth—the “Savior” will take the veil away and they will see him as he truly is.

After they are alone, Joseph unveils himself to them: he speaks to them in Hebrew, for the first time conversing without an interpreter. His first communication, however, was through tears, a universal language. He wept so loudly that those outside of the room heard it. These were not tears of grief or pain, but of overwhelming joy at his freedom to reveal himself. He says, “*ani Yoseph*,” “I am Joseph.” The hearts of the brothers must have frozen at that moment! Is it possible that this “man, the lord of Egypt,” was indeed Joseph? How could they have missed his identity? Shouldn't brothers recognize brothers? Yet somehow their eyes were blinded and their intellect dulled to the truth. Joseph would need to show personal marks of his identity to prove to them exactly who he was. His ability to speak their language becomes proof positive: he, like them, was a native Hebrew.

The manner in which Joseph makes himself known to his brothers highlights his heart of love for them. He first inquires about his father, Jacob. “Is my father still alive?” How deeply significant it must have been for Joseph to refer to Jacob as “my father!” The first admission of his identity comes like a blast to his brothers, and so Joseph immediately bids them come closer to him. He then reiterates, “*ani Yoseph*,” and proceeds to give them reassurance: “do not be grieved or angry with yourselves.” Joseph is genuinely concerned about them, not about bringing justice to bear upon them for their crimes against him. His love for his brothers has cancelled their debt.

Once again, it does not seem too far fetched to use the Joseph story as an illustration of a much larger reality: the brothers of Messiah Yeshua are unaware of His identity, but will, one day, see Him for who He truly is—the beloved of the Father. Yet this will not come about until Yeshua Himself reveals His identity to them. How tender is the heart of the Messiah toward His chosen ones—how utterly compassionate will the Holy One be when He gathers His lost sheep to Himself! And, if we may be allowed to ponder the mind of Yeshua from our limited perspective, we may wonder how anxious He is to make His true identity known. It is needful that He remain veiled to His brothers for now, in order to bring about His desired plan, but one day His overwhelming love for Israel will be displayed in His words, *ani mashiach*, “I am Messiah.” The proof that He will

give them will be far more than His own Jewish identity—He will show them the wounds of love which He bears for all eternity. With eyes opened, and the veil removed, His brothers will weep, but He will wipe the tears from their eyes, and comfort them with His forgiving words. “Then all Israel will be saved.”

One cannot help but emphasize how utterly different the heart of Yeshua towards His brothers is, when compared with the heinous crime of anti-Semitism. Often those who show disdain for the Jewish people do so under the banner of “love for Jesus.” Yet how mistaken they are! If only they could realize that the Messiah, currently hidden from His brothers, with great anticipation longs for the day when He will reveal Himself, and comfort His brothers with His greatness. His purpose in hiding His identity is, in the final analysis, so that He might save them.

Once having revealed himself to his brothers, Joseph wastes no time in outlining his plan: they should return to Canaan, gather all that is theirs, and return to Egypt where they could live out the famine under the protective hand of Joseph. Ultimately, the plan is given the stamp of approval by Pharaoh himself, but then the Pharaoh had become accustomed to agreeing with Joseph’s plans! Egyptian wagons are provided to make the journey back less burdensome, and provisions are supplied for the trip. Once again, Benjamin is given five times more, marking the blood ties with Joseph.

Joseph’s simple instruction to his brothers is: “don’t quarrel on the journey” (45:24). One can only imagine the conversation between the brothers as they returned to Canaan. Joseph wisely counsels them not to quarrel, no doubt surmising that there could be plenty of finger-pointing and blame shifting. In reality, all of the brothers were guilty of abandoning Joseph.

When the brothers return and tell Jacob the news, at first he could not believe their report—it was simply too incredible. But after seeing the many wagons loaded with supplies, and listening again to their words, the text says that his spirit revived (וַתְּחַי רוּחַ יַעֲקֹב אֲבִיהֶם). One must suppose that ever since the news of Joseph’s disappearance, the spirit of Jacob lay shrouded in the uncertainty and sorrow of his son’s demise. And so it is with the heart of parent bereft of a son or daughter: part of their spirit dies. Now, the spirit of Jacob is offered new life—Joseph is alive! The darkness under which he labored had been turned to dawn. Rejoicing would replace sorrow.

Again, our minds turn to the death of Yeshua, and the sorrow Mary and His disciples felt as they pondered the unthinkable. Listen to their words of two disciples as they conversed on the road to Emmaus (our Apostolic portion): “But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel. Indeed, besides all this, it is the third day since these things happened” (Lk 24:21). Speaking to the One who had hidden Himself (cf. Lk 24:16), they related their fallen hopes and despair. But His words burned deep into their souls, and afterwards, when they sat at table and watched Him break the bread, their eyes were opened, but He vanished from their sight. Only then did they realize that they had been walking and talking with the risen Messiah!

Jacob wastes no time. Joseph is alive in Egypt, and he has but one goal—to travel there and see his beloved son before he dies. On the way, at Beersheva, Jacob is reassured by God Himself that his journey to Egypt was part of the divine plan. Perhaps Jacob remembered the prophecy given to Abraham years before: “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). Perhaps he wondered at the oppression he would endure for travelling to Egypt. But the Almighty reassures Jacob that his flight to Egypt is proper, and that His presence would go with him. He should not fear the future. All was in the sovereign hand of his God.

Our *parashah* ends with an extensive list of those who went with Jacob to Egypt. The overarching purpose of this listing is to set the stage for the beginning of Exodus in which the contrast is made between the relatively few who came to Egypt, and the multitude that emerged while in Egypt. Thus the text refers to the “names of the sons of Israel” rather than the “sons of Jacob.”

Already, the sons of Jacob and their families are being viewed as a nation. God would be faithful to His promise, to guard, protect, and bless Jacob and his offspring.

As if often the case, the genealogical listing of Gen 46:8ff has its difficulties. For instance, the summation of the children born by Leah includes Er and Onan who did not go to Egypt but died in Canaan. Likewise, Dinah is excluded (v. 18) though she is mentioned in v. 14. Curiously, Serah, the sister of the sons of Asher, is the only such daughter listed and it seems highly unlikely that among the 53 male children listed from the sons of Jacob, only one daughter would have been born (cf. also Num 26:46; 1Chron 7:30). Indeed, in v. 7 the plural “daughters of his sons” (בְּנוֹת בְּנָיו =granddaughters) is used. There must be a reason why Serah alone is mentioned, but the text gives us no clues as to what that purpose might be.

Also of importance is the fact that the sons of Perez are listed, even though they were born after the clan descended to Egypt. It may appear at first that their listing was included to make up the lack caused by the deaths of Er and Onan, but it is more likely that Moses intends to remind us that the primary narrative purpose is to reveal the Promised One hinted at from the beginning (Gen 3:15). King David is a descendant of Perez.

Gen 46:27 and Exodus 1 sums the total of those who came to Egypt as 70. That number is usually derived as follows: from Leah, 32 (which includes Er and Onan, as well as Hezron and Hamul who were born in Egypt); from Zilpah, 16; from Rachel, (2 sons, 12 grandsons), 14; from Bilhah, 7. Thus $32 + 16 + 14 + 7 + 1 = 70$. For Er and Onan who died before Jacob descended to Egypt, some Sages substitute Dinah (who remained unmarried) and Jacob himself, as do other commentators. One should note that the opening of the genealogical list is: “These are the names of the sons of Israel, Jacob and his descendants, who came to Egypt” (46:8). Thus, it is argued, Moses intends that we include Jacob himself in the reckoning of the 70. Other Sages (e.g., Rashi) include Jochebed on the list, because according to rabbinic legend, she was born at the gate as they entered Joseph’s city (Num 26:59 says she was born “in Egypt”). This is why she is not listed in those who descended to Egypt, but since she was born as the caravan entered the city, the Sages add her name to complete the 70. They also note that she should be added because of the miracle done for her, in that she was 100 years or older when she gave birth to Moses.

The *haftarah* chosen for this *parashah* by the Sages is linked by the fact that Caleb refers to the sending of spies to assess the Land. Likewise, Joseph had charged his brothers with being spies, though he surely knew they were not. Yet this scheme of his brought about his desired end: Jacob and his entire family comes to Egypt to be protected from the famine. Likewise, Caleb’s age is given as 85, yet he confesses that he was just as strong at 85 as he was at 45, when Moses first sent him with the other spies to assess the Land. Jacob’s age in 47:9 is given as 130, highlighting the fact that God had also given him strength in his old age.

Thus, the plan of God is worked out in every detail: the descendants of Abraham, endowed with the promise of God’s covenant, descend to Egypt to preserve life, but ultimately to be enslaved and eventually to be brought forth by the mighty hand of God in the exodus. Indeed, the exodus will become the primary example of God’s way of redemption, and will transform the multiple tribes of Jacob into a single nation marked by God’s redemptive power.

The personal lessons gleaned from this portion could be many, but perhaps what stands out most obviously is the faith of Joseph, demonstrated in his willingness to trust in God and His goodness in spite of dire and unjust circumstances that befell him. Three times in Gen 45 Joseph reiterates that it was not the evil deeds of his brothers that brought him to Egypt, but it was God Who had taken him there. Joseph’s faith was a faith in the all-controlling God, Who brings about His purpose by means we often cannot fathom. Yet his faith preserved him from bitterness, and rather put him in a position to trust God for what he could not see.

Joseph therefore stands before us as a prime example of a faith that is to be emulated. Are we willing to put into the hands of our loving Father those events of life for which we have no explanation? Can we entrust into His care the outcome of events that, from our human point of view, seem contrary to righteousness and justice, believing that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose (Rom 8:28)? May our faith be strengthened, as was Joseph's, to entrust our lives constantly into the hands of the One Who controls all things after the counsel of His own will.