

Prayer

Lord God; You see the work of our hands, and the effort we put into all we do. Forgive us when we fail to do our best or leave to one side what should be done. For the sake of the Gospel and the Kingdom, give us the strength to accomplish everything You have given us to do; and when it is finished, may we hear Your words of grace; 'Well done!' Bless us through our daily work, we pray: AMEN.

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Trees

Pray about the controversial issue of deforestation. Pray that God will help Christians, churches and governments to agree on how to manage best the forests God has given us.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for your home and everything God has given you
- Pray for those involved in the Jaycee Dugard kidnapping
- Pray for statesmen who do their best for the good of all

Meditation

Make us a people of prayer, sovereign Lord,

Prayer is opening our hearts in honesty, to Jesus;
Prayer is praising Him using the words of Scripture.

Prayer is giving honour to Almighty God who made us;
Prayer is telling the Lord about our deepest concerns.

Prayer is waiting on the Saviour with listening ears;
Prayer is releasing the mind to speak in tongues.

Prayer is a challenge to speak in truth to the Lord.
Prayer is agreeing with each other, by saying 'AMEN'.

Prayer is entering into the great liturgies of the church;
Prayer is accepting whatever God says to us in reply.

Make us a people of prayer, sovereign Lord.

Bible Study - Genesis 45:16-28

¹⁶ When the news that Joseph's brothers had come reached Pharaoh's house, Pharaoh and his servants were delighted. ¹⁷ Pharaoh told Joseph, 'Instruct your brothers, "Do this: load your animals and go back to the land of Canaan." ¹⁸ Take your father and your families and bring them to me, so that I may personally give you the best of the land of Egypt, where you will eat the best produce of the land.' ¹⁹ Moreover, I insist you tell them "You must indeed do this: take wagons from the land of Egypt for your little ones and for your wives, and also to bring your father, and come. ²⁰ Do not worry about your belongings, for the best of everything in all the land of Egypt is yours."

²¹ The sons of Israel did as they were told. Joseph gave them wagons, as instructed by Pharaoh, and gave them provisions for the journey. ²² He also gave each one of them a set of clothes; but he gave Benjamin three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of garments. ²³ He also sent the following to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best products of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain, bread, and other provisions for the journey.

²⁴ As Joseph sent his brothers on their way, he emphasised to them, 'Don't be agitated as you travel.' ²⁵ So they left Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶ When they told him, 'Joseph is still alive! He is even ruler over all the land of Egypt.' He was stunned, and could not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent to carry him, the spirit of their father

Jacob revived. ²⁸ 'Enough!' said Israel. 'My son Joseph is still alive. I must go and see him before I die.'

Review

Joseph and his brothers were now reunited as one; reconciliation, when it came, was swift and complete, and the mark of an important and sovereign work of God. The unity of the brothers is indicated in several ways; by the use of the phrase 'the sons of Israel' (45:21) and also the fact that Joseph joined with his brothers in making preparations according to Pharaoh's instructions (45:21). Joseph himself had a job to do and could not leave his adopted Egypt, but he did everything in his power to do what would be necessary to persuade his aged father to leave the Promised Land of Canaan, and come to Egypt. The unity of father and sons under the protection of Joseph in Egypt would fulfil the second of Joseph's boyhood prophetic dreams (37:9); a dream the old man Jacob had 'kept in mind' (37:11).

As the brothers were reunited, Joseph responded eagerly to the brothers (45:8-15) by promising them his protection for the duration of the famine if they came to settle in Goshen (45:10), and he urged them to go and bring the entire household group with his father Jacob, to Egypt. However, Pharaoh heard the news about what had happened very quickly, and our passage today contains his orders for bringing Joseph's family to Egypt. He had a vested interest in making sure that his Vizier stayed exactly where he was, and he did not want Joseph to be required by his father to go home and join his re-discovered family in Canaan! For this reason, Pharaoh promised much more than Joseph first offered his brothers, even guaranteeing Joseph's whole family the best of everything Egypt had to offer (45:18-20). As proof of this, Pharaoh commanded that samples of Egyptian produce be sent to Joseph's father, carried in 'wagons', a luxurious mode of transport available only to Pharaoh and the highest of nobility. Pharaoh would not let Joseph go!

The brothers were given gifts of fine Egyptian clothes (45:22f.), a poignant sign of reconciliation designed by Joseph to show his forgiveness for what had been done to him. Remember, the saga began when Joseph was stripped of his special coat (37:23). Now, Joseph gave the favoured Benjamin a gift of money and five sets of clothing. It is possible that Joseph did this as a test of their reconciliation, for if there was still resentment against the two sons of Rachel (Joseph and Benjamin), then this gift might be expected to cause problems on the journey. Joseph remarked before the brothers set off; 'don't become agitated as you travel' (45:24). This was a cautious warning to the brothers not to go back on the unity they had found.

However, there was no trouble on the journey, and when the news was told to Jacob (45:26) he was 'stunned! Interestingly, it was the sight of the wagons sent at Pharaoh's insistence that persuaded him of the truth of what he had been told (45:27). What else could explain this appearance of a royal retinue from Egypt? With this, Jacob, the man who had fought his father-in-law (Laban – see Genesis 30-32) for possessions, wealth and the liberty to live wherever he liked, accepted the request of his son to leave the freedom of the land of Canaan and join him in Egypt, all because of the drought.

In a few moments of spiritual insight, the aged Jacob knew that he must fulfil the prophetic dream that was part of his memory of Joseph, the son he believed had been killed. It is also possible that he also remembered something handed down to him by his own father and grandfather; a prophecy given to Abraham on the first occasion God revealed Himself in Covenant authority and power (Gen 15:1f.). If you go back and read what God said to Abraham in on that occasion a mysterious spiritual dream (15:13-15), God declared that Abraham's descendants would go and live as 'aliens in a land that is not theirs' (15:13) where they would become a great nation despite their suffering. The prophecy was coming true, and Jacob, even in old age, was willing to give up everything to follow God's will.

Going Deeper

The Bible study continues with further information about the following subjects:

- Pharaoh's instructions
- The wagon train
- Jacob's reaction

Going Deeper

Pharaoh certainly appears to take control of the whole situation at the beginning of this text; it is his prerogative so to do. But his intervention was important and crucial for the success of the journey in persuading Jacob to come to Egypt. Our further studies track the details of what happens, and some interesting features of what is said as the story of Joseph continues to unfold.

Pharaoh's instructions

It was entirely natural that Joseph should want to make arrangements to have his father brought to see him in Egypt as swiftly as possible. However, our passage today suggests that Pharaoh acted wisely to slow down the process, in order to make sure that it was successfully accomplished and there was no compromise to his control of the land through Joseph. Pharaoh needed this man for the stability of the country at a time of drought, and any rushing about or hurrying might be misinterpreted as signs of panic within the court of Pharaoh at a critical time for the nation.

Pharaoh superseded Joseph's promises to his brothers with a personal guarantee (45:18) that Joseph's family would have the finest things of Egypt, and 'eat the best produce of the land'. In most translation, you will find that this reads 'enjoy the fat of the land'. Most scholars then suggest that the expression 'the fat of the land' refers to general wealth and possessions. I have translated this differently, because the word for 'enjoy' is a Hebrew word which can indicate the pleasure of eating; and because the whole story of Joseph is set against the severe problem of drought, the finest enjoyment would surely be to eat of the best food! The Hebrew words are perfectly capable of meaning this, it is simply a matter of understanding what the story is all about, and here it is food, not general wealth or possessions.

Belongings are specifically mentioned a couple of verses later on, when Pharaoh tells the brothers not to worry about bringing all their possessions with them (45:20). The Hebrew word here clearly means 'utensils' or 'vessels', meaning the general items of a household used for cooking and maintaining a clean household. Clearly, Pharaoh felt that these were an unnecessary encumbrance for such an important journey; he knew, as we now know from archaeology, that Egyptian technology from ceramics to metalwork was of far superior quality than that found in Canaan or any other part of that region!

The wagon train

The wagon train was assembled with food and produce for the journey (45:23), together with donkeys loaded with evidence of the fine products (literally, the 'good things') of Egypt. Extravagance was also demonstrated by the ten donkeys and ten female donkeys loaded appropriately (45:23). The gifts given to the brothers by Joseph were a further pledge from Joseph himself, signifying the new relationship that had been established. They would also be a sign to the old man Jacob of the truth of the story the brothers would have to tell. We should remember that the brothers would have to tell Jacob the truth about what had happened when Joseph was sold off to Egypt, and would have to confess that the bloodied cloak they showed him to prove Joseph's death was a lie. Hopefully the evidence of these new clothes given by Joseph would prove to Jacob that Joseph had forgiven his brothers for their treachery. Reconciliation meant that the dark family secret was not buried, but brought out into the open, dealt with, and forgiven.

Much debate surrounds the words of Joseph which I have translated 'don't be agitated as you travel' (45:24). Most translations have different words here, varying from 'do not quarrel' to 'have no recriminations' and 'don't worry about anything'. The implications of what Joseph may have said are therefore unclear. Was he reinforcing that they had nothing to worry about? Was he challenging them not to fight together about how they should tell their father what had happened (including confessing to what they had done to Joseph)? Was he warning them not to pick on Benjamin because of the favouritism Joseph showed him as his only 'full' brother? Ultimately, we cannot be sure, and my translation leaves this open. Sometimes Scripture does leave us with more than one thing to consider from a simple sentence!

Jacob's reaction

When the brothers arrived in Canaan, it was clear that they had not fallen out! They were still excited by everything that had happened to them, and told their father the great news (45:25). Jacob's response mirrors their own stunned disbelief when Joseph first revealed himself to them (45:3). It appears that there was a period of explanations and discussions, as things had to be said and explained (45:27) before Jacob was able to be convinced that what had been told him was true. Certainly, the wagons ordered by Pharaoh were the impressive proof of the truth of everything he had been told (45:27); and the 'spirit of their father Jacob revived'.

When Joseph first disappeared, Jacob had mourned his favourite son with the first of his pronouncements of grief within the story 'I shall go down to the grave in mourning, to go and be with my son.' (37:33-35). The whole reason for Jacob's distress was his assumption that he would leave an heir through the eldest son of his first love and favoured wife, Rachel; and through his protection of Benjamin he attempted to ensure that this son would now be the heir of God's promises. When the brothers first attempted to persuade Jacob to let Benjamin go with them to Egypt in order to buy grain, Jacob cried out again 'you would bring down my grey head to the grave with sorrow.' (42:38) fearing that he would have no heir from his favoured sons. It may well be that the revival in Jacob's spirit as recorded in this passage (45:28) is not simply a response to the successful return of Benjamin, or the news that Joseph was still alive, but his realisation that his twelve sons were united, reconciled, and acting as one; as the 'sons of Israel!' (see 45:21). Jacob's heir would not be one son, but all twelve sons.

You may feel this to be a little presumptive, for the story hardly tells us all this within the passage today. However, it is clear that when Jacob was close to death, his view of his sons had changed. On his 'deathbed', he offered a form of blessing to each of his sons, and although each son received a very different blessing, the chapter of Scripture in which this is set makes it clear that all the sons are heirs before God of the Covenant blessing of Israel (Genesis 49). It is highly likely that the reconciliation of the brothers with Joseph played an important part in this important shift in the development of Israel.

Application

This is a happy and joyous part of the story of Joseph, and one which gives us some real hope that God does indeed control all human history; even if he sometimes has to use a pagan Pharaoh to do it! The coming chapters of Genesis describe Jacob's arrival in Egypt and the settlement of the sons of Israel in Goshen according to the prophecy given to Abraham (15:13-15). They also tell of the results of the prolonged drought which adds further to the personal wealth of both Joseph and Pharaoh. What is important however is this change in the identity of the people of Israel. They are not to be left in Canaan to be assimilated into the population, but forged into a nation through their sense of identity in a foreign land.

This is a parable of the life of God's people even to this day. New Testament writers talk of our having a heavenly 'citizenship' (Philippians 3:20) which defines our relationship with Christ, and is different from the identity we have as people who live in this or that country here on earth; Paul describes us as 'citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God' (Eph 2:19). For this reason Christians talk of being 'in the world but not of the world', a sentence which is not found in scripture but which pieces together what Christ tries to explain to the disciples in his great discourses recorded in John 15 and 17 (see especially John 17:9,15,24). The sons of Jacob had to come to Egypt to be in Egypt, but not of Egypt.

It remains very important that Christian people are aware of their 'dual' citizenship and their role as earthly and heavenly citizens. An unbalance in this will distort both the Gospel message and Christian discipleship. As we track the people of God through the Old Testament, their successes and failures in handling such matters yield important teaching for the church today; teaching which is not often accepted or taught. As and when we continue our studies in the Old Testament, we will discover more of this and its importance.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. What would you feel about leaving everything behind in order to find a better life?
2. To what extent does immigration law today prevent people from starting a new life in a new country? Should we be more open or more closed, and why?
3. Discuss the evidence for unity and reconciliation between the sons of Israel in this passage.

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The story of the preparations for Jacob's coming to Egypt are not just the tail end of the story. They tell us a great deal about the fulfilment of prophecy and the ability of Jacob to follow God's will, even in old age and at a time when he would have expected to do no more and travel no further. At the point we give up, it seems that God makes everything possible again! I wonder whether this has been your experience; it certainly has been mine!

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Are there things in your past that are unresolved? What might the Lord do to resolve what has happened? Is it possible that the Lord would act to change your life and put right some of the deep hurts and troubles of your past? It may seem impossible, but like Jacob, do not lose heart that the Lord will do His will!*
- *Pray for any people you know who have been hurt by things that have been said and done in their families, and it seems impossible for there to be any resolution. Pray that God will work to bring resolution for His glory and to show His power.*

Final Prayer

Dear Lord, hear Your people today. Hear the cry of those who are in distress; hear the stories of those who have been abused, hear the anguish of those who have been bereaved, and hear the heartbreak of those

whose lives have been shattered. Minister to these by the power of the Holy Spirit, and bring them peace:
AMEN
