

Prayer

Lord God, Your mercies have touched every part of my soul.
Thank You for all You have done so that I might have the gift of peace.
Praise You for sustaining me at all times and creating new hope within me.
Glory be to You for the energy and transforming power of the Holy Spirit.
Lord God, You gave Your Son Jesus Christ to save and heal me.
Alleluia! AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Trees

In some countries, the law protects many trees, yet some have little regard for this and illegal logging and felling is a considerable problem. Pray against this abuse of God's world

On-going prayers

- *Pray for children who suffer because of bad schooling*
- *Give thanks for your home and everything God has given you*
- *Pray for those involved in the Jaycee Dugard kidnapping*

Meditation

Jesus, You are a worker of miracles.

Perform the miracle of grace that opens up the human heart,
And reveals the truth within the Word of God.

Perform the miracle of hope that shows the world Your love,
And demonstrates the passion of the Father for His children.

Perform the miracle of healing that cures the body and soul,
And shows the world Your keep Your promises forever.

Perform the miracle of peace that draws all people together,
And triumphs over enmity with reconciliation.

Perform the miracle of faith, as people hear Your Word afresh,
And make the church a place of revival once again!

Jesus, You are a worker of miracles!

Bible Study - Genesis 46:1-27

This is a long passage with a long list of people. If you wish, read verses 1 to 7 and 26 to 27, and the whole passage will be explained in the full Bible study.

¹ Israel set out on his journey with all his belongings, and came to Beer-sheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. ² God spoke to Israel in visions of the night, and said, 'Jacob, Jacob.' And he replied, 'Here I am.' ³ Then he said, 'I am God, the God of your father; do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I will make you into a great nation. ⁴ I will go down with you to Egypt myself, and I will certainly bring you back again after Joseph has closed your eyes with his own hand.' ⁵ Then Jacob left Beer-sheba; and the sons of Israel carried their father Jacob, their wives and their children, in the wagons Pharaoh had sent for his transport. ⁶ They also took their livestock with them, and the goods that they had obtained in the land of Canaan. So Jacob and all his offspring came into Egypt; ⁷ he took with him his sons and his grandsons, his daughters and granddaughters; he brought all his descendants to Egypt.

⁸ These are the names of the Israelites (Jacob and his offspring) who came to Egypt. Now Reuben was Jacob's firstborn. ⁹ Reuben's children: Hanoah, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. ¹⁰ Simeon's children: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachin, Zohar, and Shaul (born to a Canaanite

woman). ¹¹ Levi's children: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. ¹² Judah's children: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah (but Er and Onan died in the land of Canaan); and the children of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. ¹³ Issachar's children: Tola, Puvah, Jashub and Shimron. ¹⁴ Zebulun's children: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel ¹⁵ (these are Leah's sons, whom she bore to Jacob in Paddan-aram, together with his daughter Dinah; a total of 33 descendants). ¹⁶ Gad's children: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. ¹⁷ Asher's children: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. The children of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. ¹⁸ (these are Zilpah's children. Laban gave Zilpah to his daughter Leah, and she bore Jacob these 16 descendants). ¹⁹ The children of Jacob's wife Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. ²⁰ Joseph's children born in the land of Egypt were Manasseh and Ephraim, borne to him by Asenath, daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. ²¹ Benjamin's children: Bela, Becher, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. ²² (These are Rachel's children, born to Jacob, a total of 14 descendants). ²³ Dan's child: Hashum. ²⁴ Naphtali's children: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. ²⁵ (These are Bilhah's children. Laban gave Bihah to his daughter Rachel, and she bore Jacob these 7 descendants).

²⁶ The entire family of Jacob who travelled to Egypt, including his direct descendants but not the wives of his sons, were 66 persons in all. ²⁷ Including Jacob and Joseph and the two children born to him in Egypt, this means that the total descendants of the house of Jacob who came into Egypt, numbered 70.

Review

God is with His people wherever they go. This is the message of this passage of Scripture, with its tale of Jacob's departure from Canaan and the long list of his descendants who came with him. It was clearly understood that 70 of God's people (46:27) formed the original settlement of Israel in Egypt (see Exodus 1:5 and Deuteronomy 10:22), and from them grew the whole nation. The mathematics involved in arriving at this number from those quoted in the list (46:8-25) is not straightforward, but it can all be explained reasonably, and you will find this in the later sections of the Bible study. However, the significance of the journey was profound and life changing for all concerned; and Jacob stopped at Beersheba, the southern border of the Promised Land, to worship the Lord. Despite the enthusiasm of the moment and the prospect of seeing Joseph, his long lost son, Jacob needed reassurance from the God of his Fathers that what he was doing was right.

When Jacob offered worship at Beersheba, God revealed Himself to Jacob powerfully, and in a personal way. He called Jacob's name twice, to which Jacob replied 'Here I am' (46:2); very similar to the call of Moses (Exodus 3:6) and Samuel (1 Samuel 3:2f.) and others at significant moments within the Old Testament. God then promised He would be with Jacob and his family as they went down to Egypt. God's presence is something we take for granted today, largely because we know that God is with us everywhere through Jesus Christ. However, in the ancient times of the Old Testament such as described here in this passage, people believed that the gods were 'local'. This means that they were believed to live in certain places, and the best thing a migrant group could do was to worship the gods of the places to which they went. This was not to be so for God's people, as the promises made to Jacob in his dream made very clear; the Lord God was not a local God, but God of the whole world. Jacob knew that God had a plan for His people, but all he needed to know was that he was doing what was right, and that as a sign of God's future intent, Jacob would return to Canaan after he had died (after Joseph 'closed' his eyes – 46:4).

With this reassurance, Jacob proceeded; though it is interesting to see that he took absolutely everything he owned, his belongings, possessions and his flocks and herds (46:5-7). This was not what Pharaoh wanted! He said that the family of Jacob should come leaving everything behind, because they could find better things in Egypt (45:20). They may well have been better, but Jacob was not about to let go of his heritage, and by bringing everything he indicated that his own descendants should retain their identity and not become subsumed into Egypt.

It was therefore important for a complete and accurate count to be made of exactly who went to Egypt; hence the meticulous and orderly record of the separate sons and descendants of the two wives and two concubines of Jacob (Leah and Zilpah, and Rachel and Bilhah). Only the direct descendants of Jacob were listed, and not the wives of Jacob's sons (46:26), and the total number of people who travelled to Egypt was 66 (see later for how Scripture arrives at this number). With the addition of Jacob himself and Joseph and his two sons, this made the total number of 'people of Israel' in Egypt to be the correct number, 70.

It may seem to us that parts of Scripture like this are rather straightforward and uninteresting. But we should not forget the profound importance of God's presence with us on our journeys, especially when our earthly pathway does not seem to seem to be very logical despite God's obvious call. Firstly, it is crucial that we

have this basic spiritual assurance; and secondly, God does indeed know and count every single one of His children, and his meticulous care is something from which we should learn.

Going Deeper

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

- Leaving Canaan
- The promises of God to Jacob
- The migration of Jacob and his descendants to Egypt

Going Deeper

There is so much more in these verses for us to explore! Indeed, the first half of this passage records the last of the great revelations of God to the Forefathers. It is prophetic in nature, looking ahead to the time of the Exodus. Even the list of names reveals one or two important facts, and draws together the story about who it was who went down to Egypt.

Leaving Canaan

It was no small matter for Jacob to leave Hebron and travel south to Egypt. In his youth he had been forced to leave his parents home and travel to the north, to Mesopotamia, to search for a wife; an adventure which defined his life and also produced the twelve sons who now looked after him. He still had his wife Leah and maids Zilpah and Bilhah (Rachel had died in childbirth), and having worked throughout his life to establish a substantial household, drought or no drought, he was not going to leave anything of his possessions behind! The passage begins 'Israel set out ... with all his belongings ...' (46:1).

At the southernmost border of the Promised Land, Jacob stopped at Beersheba. This was the home of his father Isaac, and a most appropriate place for him to pause and offer worship to God. Just as when he left the Promised Land in his youth (28:10f.) God spoke to him powerfully. It does not come across in English, but the Hebrew words used by God are extraordinary and uniquely emphatic in verse 3. Literally, they read 'I am the God, the God of your father ...', using a repetition of a single name of God in such a way as to say 'I am the only one true God of your father ...'. This revelation of God's presence happened in what is called 'visions of the night' (46:2), itself a strange and unique expression that indicated a powerful yet repeated experience. It was no 'run of the mill' spiritual experience, but a momentous occasion, indicating the importance of the Covenant promises of God which came with it.

The promises of God to Jacob

Firstly, God called on Jacob to have no fear of what lay ahead. He had said this to Abraham (15:1) and then Isaac (26:24), each time as part of the Covenant promise of God that He would make a great nation out of Abraham's descendants. Jacob was then challenged to trust God with the fulfilment of His promise, not in Canaan, as expected, but in Egypt. We would understand if Jacob was a little confused by this, because from an earthly point of view it did not make sense. But we have seen through our studies of recent texts that God intended His people to discover their distinctiveness through retaining a unique identity whilst living in Egypt, a process called 'living as aliens in a foreign land' (see Gen 15:13, 35:27 and 47:4).

Finally, God promised Jacob that he would die peacefully with his son Joseph present (46:4) and be taken back to the Promised Land for burial with his father and grandfather. The manner of this revelation however, was not simply a personal word to Jacob. Jacob was 'Israel', and the 'night visions' were prophetic not simply of Jacob's return to the Promised Land, but of Israel's return hundreds of years later at the time of the Exodus. When we come to read about this in the coming months we will find that this text is used as a prophecy of the Exodus in more than one place.

The migration of Jacob and his descendants to Egypt

There are a number of occasions in the Bible where God calls for radical action on the part of His people, which include the movement of families or nations. In Genesis, Noah took his family (and many animals) into the Ark for an unknown journey of salvation (Genesis 6-8); Abraham and his father were called to travel from Ur to Haran to Canaan (Gen 11:31-12:9); and Jacob himself had twice made epic journeys both out of Canaan and back again (28:10f. and 31:17f.) Each time, those chosen by God had to place themselves in His hands and trust Him for an unknown future; however, this did not mean that the people involved did not take with them all they needed! Jacob came from nomadic stock, and although he had lived in Hebron for many of his later years, he was quite familiar with what to do to organise a general family migration in which everything was taken. The sight of the wagons from Pharaoh helped Jacob believe the truth about what he had been told, but they also provided him with means for transporting 66 people and all their belongings to Egypt!

At this point, we need to look at the mathematics of the numbers mentioned in the text. If you add up the numbers of the descendants of Jacob through Leah (33), Zilpah (16), Rachel (14) and Bilhah (7) you will see the total is seventy, not the 66 mentioned in verse 26. Firstly, the wives themselves were not included in the numbers because strictly speaking, they were not 'descendants' of Jacob, however important they were as wives. Secondly, we must add Dinah because she was not counted in the total for Leah (see 46:15) but then take away Er and Onan because they died (46:12 – see also Gen 38). Then thirdly, we have to subtract Joseph and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh who were of course still in Egypt. Add that up, and you will arrive at 66 people who made the journey from Canaan!

Then, upon arrival in Egypt, the number of the 'People of Israel' then becomes 70 if we include Joseph and his two sons again, and also add in Jacob himself! You may ask yourself, why are these numbers and records important? It is because each individual is important to God, and the only way we can reflect this individual attention is to be accurate in our accounting and our records of the real people who make up the people of God. It is a theme which returns in the Bible on many occasions, not least in Revelation, where there is a 'book of names' (Rev 17:8).

Application

Although the church today is often somewhat loose in its record keeping and identification of 'church members' for example, largely because of cultural reasons, we are warned by this and other Scriptural texts that if we will not keep accurate records of who identifies publicly with Christ and the Gospel, then God surely does. Our laxity merely reflects the desire on the part of too many to avoid being identified with 'the Church' for various reasons. It is quite common for churches in various parts of the world to hold services in which large numbers of people take part, but no-one knows who they are or is bothered to find out or even keep a register. It is an essential part of our Gospel that we call people to publicly identify with Christ and 'sign up' to being a part of the people of God. Our forefathers were often far more keen on record keeping than we are, but we value their efforts when we research the past. It is possible that when people in the future come to investigate our own age, they will be faced with vast numbers of telephone, internet and banking data, and the usual registers of births deaths and marriages; but few useable local records of what real people did with their lives; who did what, and when. God, however, knows His 'own', and we should seek to imitate that.

The second thing we can learn from this text is the extraordinary manner in which the aged Jacob placed his trust in Almighty God by being prepared to turn his whole life upside down and face an unknown future. It is my observation that the more God's people do this, the more the work of the Kingdom is evidenced in the world. Certainly, the church can keep itself going behind closed doors, enabling many people and families to express their faith in useful and relevant ways. There is a real difference however when people 'lay all on the altar for the Lord'. I saw the consequences of this when I taught at Bible College, and observed the transformations that could occur when people did just this in order to follow the Lord's guidance. Abraham and the Forefathers are our ancestors in faith, but they also teach us that faith is best expressed by radical commitment. That is the response God can best use.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Read God's words in the 'visions of the night' (46:2-5). How much of this was for Jacob, and how much was prophetic for God's people Israel?
2. Discuss whether you believe it important to read carefully through the lists of ancestors and other genealogies within the Bible.
3. What kind of faith is required to 'trust all to God'?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

At critical moments in life, God will often meet us and offer us words of guidance and counsel; these are precious occasions when reassurance and guidance are essential to our spiritual life. I have known what it is like to launch out in faith when I became a missionary, and I faced the uncertainties of the future with little knowledge of what lay ahead. The tension was relieved by prayer and by sharing with my wife, and we found that God was indeed leading us in special ways that were unique and almost indefinable.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Even though Jacob trusted all to God, he took all his belongings with him, in order to retain the identity of His people when they stayed in Egypt. Living as we do in a secular and materialistic*

world, what sorts of possessions are important for our identity as Christians, and what are unimportant?

- *Pray for those who find it hard to face new circumstances and new challenges, preferring to stay put where they are in life. Pray that God will encourage them to trust Him.*

Final Prayer

Make us servant of yours, Lord Jesus Christ, who are ready to do Your will whenever You ask. May we not be people who prevaricate and are cautious about stepping out in faith, but willing to do anything for You when we know that You have called us. Thank You Lord Jesus: AMEN
