

JANUARY 23

Genesis 46-47

Genesis 46

Vs. 1-4 This is an important event. Israel would not return to the land for 400 years. God is particularly tender to Jacob. Jacob had believed in the promise, and now God was not only confirming the promise but giving Jacob additional information to pass on to his heirs. It doesn't appear that God spoke to people often, but we see God speaking to Jacob here (who, by the way, hadn't left the promised land, even in the famine) at a time when it was important to encourage Jacob. God confirms the promise, showing His faithfulness to His plan of redemption. There is little to suggest that there was ongoing devotion to God and seeking Him on the part of Jacob. This is one of the few times we hear of Jacob offering sacrifices. Yet, God remained faithful and tender.

Beersheba was a special place in the lives of Abe, Isaac and Jacob. This is where Jacob stole the blessing and ran to Haran to enjoy life with Laban.

As Moses is writing this, he is surrounded by the millions of Israelites who were brought out of Egypt to return to the land. God was and is faithful to His Word.

Vs. 5-27 The math summarized here is an editorial on how many *descendants of Israel* went in to Egypt. What is being counted are those who belonged to Jacob by blood. Later in Numbers we'll see how many descendants of Israel came out. Remember too, that Jacob took all his servants and livestock. That would have been a small city. The little comments made about the number of men Abe took to rescue Lot, and the fact that the holdings of Jacob and Esau were so large that the land couldn't hold both of them, are important to remember and think about to give you a 3D view of what is happening. They would have been a large company.

Vs. 28-34 Notice that Jacob sent Judah ahead, showing again, the prominence of Judah. There have been a lot of tears shed in this story, but thanks to the Lord, there is now a happy ending.

It's interesting how the Lord often blesses through bad things. The Egyptians hated shepherds, forcing Israel to locate in Goshen, which was a well watered delta paradise, even in the time of famine. The Lord knows what He's doing and even uses the sin of man to accomplish His purpose of redemption.

Genesis 47

Vs. 1-12 This shows the meeting with Pharaoh and the settling of Israel in Goshen. Verse 9 gets me every year. Jacob was 130 years old and he summarizes his years as *few and evil*. And we know it is no exaggeration. What a sad statement, and to think, Jacob, the man who believed in the blessing, was himself responsible for much of his own personal tragedy.

When the results of what we have done (and the chain reactions thereof) are complicated, tangled, and out of control, we feel trapped and feel we have no control. But the solution is simple. When you come to your senses and commit yourself to following God, in the next thing you do, honor the Lord. At that point, no matter how complicated you have made life or what is being demanded of you, dare to honor God. Being in the Word gives us confidence in God's love and faithfulness, and His Word tells us what to do. The Gordian knot is simple to deal with. You don't unravel it, you cut it. But it takes using the Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God. And it takes a person who is surrendered to the love and heart of Christ to make this happen. Yet, it is so simple as to be profound. The next thing you do, honor the Lord. He leads to truth and peace.

Vs. 13-26 So, why do you think that Moses and the Spirit want us to have this particular information? Here is something to think about. Israel grew as a nation inside of Egypt for 400 years. The Egyptians remembered what Joseph had done for them as a nation for 2-3 hundred

years. That is an incredible legacy. The US has gone 200 years as a nation and we still (sort of) respect the founders of the country. As we see new generations arise and people tinker with, and misunderstand, the intent of the founders, we could figure that in another 100 years we will forget to respect and honor them. We already have begun imagining ourselves to be geniuses who could have done a better job, without their education and faith, and without paying the price they paid. The Egyptians are grateful for Joseph saving their lives. Joseph was a hero and patriot. But that will be forgotten.

This section is probably here to show us the actions that made Joseph a national hero whose respect lasted hundreds of years, until a pharaoh came who didn't know Joseph, and made Israel slaves.

Vs. 27-28 God gave Jacob 17 good years with Joseph, not to mention peace and honesty in his life and family. If Joe had his sons during the first seven years of plenty, it means that Jacob got to see Joseph's sons enter their 20s.

Vs. 29-31 This section actually introduces Jacob's final blessings. Jacob wanted to be buried in the family grave, in the land of promise. This was in anticipation of God's promise to lead the nation back into Canaan and to give it to them as an inheritance.

In all the details of this story, God never lost sight of working toward the redemption of man and the coming of Christ. We are now a part of that plan and story. We have seen what happens when people lose sight of God's plan, but we have been saved by Christ and commissioned by Him. We are to follow Him into the harvest to bring the news of this salvation and promise to the lost. Our commission is to make disciples, who make disciples. We need to make sure we're not the ones who bring the chaos into our lives through trickery, ambition and impatience. Still, there will always be resistance and hardship for those who follow Christ. The Spirit's power isn't seen in His keeping us out of trouble, but rather in His creating peace and joy in us as we follow Christ through the trouble.

Matthew 15:1-28

Vs. 1-9 These Pharisees and scribes (lawyers of the law) got more than they bargained for with this criticism. The scribes had created so many laws and traditions in addition to what God had written, that people were no longer following what God said. As a result, it was very hard for a person to find God. This is what is behind Jesus' rebuke.

Honoring father and mother meant providing for them in their old age. The scribes figured that if a son wanted to commit to supporting the temple with his money, he would be exempt from helping his parents. Jesus didn't see it that way.

Vs. 7-9 Jesus' quote of Isaiah 29:13 is really a description of the power of sin. Rather than serving God, we create a god and laws to appease our conscience and allow us to serve ourselves.

Vs. 10-20 After Jesus contradicted the leaders publicly, the disciples came to Jesus privately and received the explanation of His teaching.

V. 12 The Pharisees already wanted to kill Jesus. Apparently Jesus' public rebuke regarding "unwashed hands" put them in an especially murderous mood.

Vs. 13-14 The disciples still feared the scribes and the Pharisees. I think one of the reasons Jesus interfaced with these leaders so often was to teach His disciples that God was bigger than they were and that the Word had to be expressed, without Jesus' disciples fearing these types of men.

Vs. 21-28 Jesus left Judah because the Jewish leaders were so mad, and eventually He began to take His message to the Gentiles. In essence, He had already been rejected by the nation and its leaders. They would make that official later. Now, you can see Jesus expanding His ministry to the Gentiles.

Jesus tried to keep His visit here "low key," but the Father had other plans.

V. 22 Notice that there is a very evident and extraordinary faith in the Canaanite woman. For her to call Jesus the *Son of David* was not normal. She knew something and Jesus picked up on it. It will explain why Jesus could challenge her faith and use her as an example to the disciples.

Jesus was shifting His ministry to the Gentiles and toward the birth of the church. Israel had all but officially rejected Him, and the cross was looming ahead. The disciples were true blue Jews and they hated Gentiles. We will see God work with the disciples and other Jewish Christians in a mighty way to help them overcome their prejudice and hatred. This is a first step. They will see a faith in this Gentile woman that they have seen only rarely in Israel.

V. 23 Jesus ignored the woman in order to show the disciples the depth of her faith. I always find this amusing that she was begging Jesus for her daughter and now the Twelve are begging Him to get rid of her.

Vs. 26-28 So, who was being tested and who was being given a lesson here? I know the words about throwing the children's bread to the dogs seems hard, but it looks to me that Jesus knew her faith in the Son of David would win the day. I think it is the disciples who are getting the test and the lesson. It was the Jews who viewed the Gentiles as dogs. In spite of Jesus' words, her need and her faith in Jesus drove her forward. Faith persists and God is merciful. The woman grasped that and persisted until Jesus blessed her and freed her daughter. Jesus praised her faith and the disciples received a lesson in how Gentiles could follow Christ.

Isn't it interesting that the people who claimed to be following God were Jesus' worst enemies. Their rigid, self-made laws made Jesus their enemy. They determined what God should be like and what He should say, and so they couldn't accept Jesus. Yet when Jesus went to those who knew they were lost, to the Gentiles, He found sincere faith and openness. That should tell us something about working in the harvest. We are to work in the harvest and with those believers

who have a willingness to follow Christ into the harvest. Unfortunately, many disciples ruin themselves trying to work with churches that are not interested in the harvest. These churches live to hold the "rules." It is sad to say this, but I have been in churches where Jesus couldn't have been an elder. I'm sure if He had shown up, they wouldn't have liked Him. In the harvest we find the Lord and we find the freshness of new faith. That is where we are to make disciples, who make disciples.

Psalm 19

When I read a psalm like this, I picture two periods of David's life, both of which were simpler, less busy and complicated than when he became king of the entire nation.

Vs. 1-6 First, all those years as a shepherd, looking out on God's creation created a deep devotion to God in David. It takes time and quiet for this to happen.

Vs. 7-14 Second, in those seven years in Hebron as King of Judah, David also learned. I believe it was in those years, reflecting on God's saving him from Saul, that he transcribed the first five books of the Bible, as Deuteronomy says a king should do. It was probably during that time when David wrote Psalm 119. His devotion to the Word of God grew during this time of quiet.

In this psalm, you have both the declaration of creation to the glory of God, and the Word of God declaring the glory of God.

What always hits me is that when David had time or took the time, his heart was wholly the Lord's, and God's glory flowed from his life. But when this same man became busy, distracted, and engaged in the press of life, he failed. He drifted from God and brought deep pain into his life and family.

What the Lord wants us to see in the life of David, besides enjoying this great psalm, is that a disciple should follow Christ simply in this life, abiding in Him, taking time with Him, working in the harvest. That is the life that declares the glory of God. A life full of things and activities and multitasking doesn't do that for God. At best it makes for a very superficial disciple. At worst, it makes for a life that looks like Jacob's or David's.

Proverbs 4:14-19

Many of the proverbs have a contrast, and this one does too in vs. 18 and 19. Following Christ, His way, brings clarity, hope, stability and growing light. It is interesting that the lives of Jacob, David and Solomon became darker as they became busier. They became shrewder, more political, more complicated. These men became less focused on God and more focused on themselves. Life is busy, but the focus has to remain uncomplicated, simple and cleansed daily by the Word. We are to honor God by following and abiding in Christ and His love, in the harvest.