

Incidents from domestic life
Genesis 46-48

Introduction

These chapters deal with Jacob's arrival in Egypt with his family, and Joseph, in his masterly way, administrating the corn supply. There are also several domestic incidents within the family, which find an echo in all our lives. We shall observe the guidance of God in domestic affairs, strength of family life and see the patriarch Jacob preparing for death.

Divine guidance which brought Jacob to Egypt

We are told that the three most traumatic experiences in life are bereavement, divorce, and moving house. And in the case of the latter, the older we are, the more difficult it is to move. Here is Jacob at 130 years leaving his familiar surroundings and going to the strange and unknown country of Egypt. It is always hard to pull up roots, but God's way was perfectly clear, and as Jacob stepped forward, assurance was given to him about God's support.

God guides us in several ways, and the more things come together, the more sure we are that we are in His will. He guides through His Word, inward constraint, the advice of others, and through circumstances. Jacob did not have a copy of the Scriptures of course, but he did have an intimacy with God. He began as a cheat and deceiver, but his life changed and was moulded, especially after he met God at Bethel and was broken by Him at the Ford of Jabbok. From that point onwards his intimacy with God and obedience to Him became closer and closer. There was inner constraint and a sense of God's will.

Then circumstances also pointed to a move. Famine was all around. There was the ever-present danger of starvation if they stayed where they were, and the prospect of staying alive if they moved. There was abundance and safety in Egypt. Then there was the advice and urging of his son Joseph to join him, and his natural desire to see his son who, for years, he had thought was dead. Sanctified common sense pointed to Egypt.

So Jacob set off. It seemed the right thing to do but there must have been many questions in his mind. God had earlier promised his people the land of Canaan. Here he was leaving for a country that was heathen and God had not said anything about that in His promises. But when he stepped out, God spoke to him in a vision. **Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again** (Genesis 46:3,4). Note that the assurance of God's presence came after he had started out. It can be the same in our experience. When we have done all we can to find out God's will, though we still have a lot of questions, and the way ahead not completely clear, as we move forward we receive assurance that deepens. We must make the first move, resting on His bare Word, before assurance fully and finally comes. We must go in faith, and then the way opens up and obstacles are removed.

God has plans for us and for His people through us, that we know nothing about. He sees the end from the beginning. Years ahead are involved. Our lives are going to affect people whom we haven't even met yet. We are in the dark about all this. We are only shown one step at a time. "Trust and obey" ought to be our watchword. Our ignorance and fear ought to keep us close to Him.

God's purposes and plans cover every aspect of the lives of His people – career, marriage, where we should live, movements, journeys, domestic situation, and families. As we walk in obedience, guidance and provision are sure. God's guidance is real, certain, and precious as ever, and embraces every aspect of life. **When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice (John 10:4). He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way (Psalm 25:9). In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight (Proverbs 3:6).**

God has purposes of love for us and ours. Initially it may seem strange because we cannot see the end. We must trust where we cannot trace. God will never forsake His own. For our own sakes and for the sakes of those people whose lives we touch and influence, now and in the future, we must acknowledge God in all our ways and seek His guidance.

Sacredness of family life

All families have ups and downs, and not least Jacob's family. It is not everyday that brothers throw one of the others in a pit and sell him as a slave. Bad things may happen – but probably not that bad. In spite of everything, especially on Joseph's part, there was still a strong bond of family love. Earlier we saw his full and generous forgiveness of his brothers when they were in his power, and his passionate love for his father and repeated enquiry after his father. Now we see a warm and tearful meeting after many years. **He threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time (Genesis 46:29).** He even introduces his withered, old, shepherd father to Pharaoh himself. There was a tremendous social gulf in that day between royal court, and the ordinary people. But Joseph was not ashamed of his family.

So Joseph settled his father and his brothers in Egypt and gave them property in the best part of the land, the district of Rameses, as Pharaoh directed (Genesis 47:11). Joseph was concerned that his own sons should have old Jacob's blessing. **Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. "Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. Bring them to me so I may bless them." So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them (Genesis 48:1-10).**

The whole story of Joseph, and indeed the patriarchal period, demonstrates the sacredness of the family and the need for love and loyalty to be displayed. This was stronger than the misunderstandings, jealousy and long absences. Mutual obligations – husbands to wives, wives to husbands, children to parents and parents to children – and by implication responsibility to other family members – continues to be

emphasised in the New Testament, and exemplified by men of God, and supremely by the Saviour Himself.

How many ills in society are traceable to the break up of family life? God has placed us in families. This is His ordained way. The establishment and maintenance of family life is one of the great channels of blessing in the world. The Christian family ought to be a model and a witness.

Jacob's approach to death

The record is full of detail about Jacob's death. He had lived in Goshen for 17 years, staying long after the famine had finished. **The time drew near for Israel to die** (Genesis 47:29). Old Testament people did not have full light on the subject of death, but they did have some light. Christ had yet to come and conquer death and reveal the fullness and glory of light which was yet to be. Jacob saw death as being **gathered to my people** (Genesis 49:29). In a spiritual sense this is death to a Christian – we are not going into a cold unsympathizing realm, but to be with the Lord and also our people, those who have died before us in the Lord, awaiting our coming with joy and looking forward to reunion.

Facing his imminent death, there were certain things Jacob knew he had to do. Arrangements had to be made for his funeral, and he made it clear that he wanted Joseph to take his body back to Israel. He did not want to remain in the land of Egypt with its Temples and pyramids, but to rest in the land of promise. He imparted his blessing to his two grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who would take Joseph's place on the list of Jacob's sons and on the map of Israel.

The sunset of Jacob's life was very beautiful, and a model for all. His faith looked upward. He reviewed his life, and expected God to be faithful in the future as He had been in the past, and to prosper and bless his family. He looked back with gratitude to **the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the angel who has delivered me from all harm** (Genesis 48:15,16). He looked forward and prayed that God would bless his sons and grandsons. **Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers"** (Genesis 48:21).

Jacob's life ended with blessing, gratitude, love, faith and hope. He was conscious of God's presence and peace. He had confidence in all God's promises. Is this our approach to death? Reconciliation with God is our great need. If we have this, then we can have confidence about the future. Indeed we have greater cause to be confident than Jacob had because Christ has come and died and risen again. We can say triumphantly, **our Saviour, Christ Jesus, has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel** (2 Timothy 1:10), **even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me** (Psalm 23:4). Happy are they who can say, **I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day** (2 Timothy 4:7,8).