TRUTH APPLICATIONS

Class Notes

Jacob's Family Settles in Egypt

Genesis 46.28–47.12

Section Structure

1. We are in the eighth of the ten episodes of Joseph's story: *Jacob and his family settle in Egypt (46.1–47.12)* (Longacre 2003, 471–473; review the list here).

2. While Longacre splits chapter 47 between two episodes, others see 46–47 as a single unit, with six parts.
   a. God's direction to Israel that he should not be afraid for the family to go to Egypt, beginning of the journey, and a genealogy of family members (46.1–27).
   b. Arrival in the region of Goshen and reuniting of Jacob and Joseph (46.28–34).
   c. Settlement in Goshen officially sanctioned by Pharaoh (47.1–6).
   d. Presentation of Jacob to Pharaoh (47.7–12).
   e. A record of Joseph's administration of the famine with the Egyptians (47.13–26).
   f. Summary of Israel's settling in Egypt with Israel's/Jacob's request to not be buried there (47.27–31).

3. Although this is one of the episodes in the Joseph account, it is part of the section of the book designated the תּוֹלְדוֹת (*tolēḏot*; "generations") of Jacob (37.2) (see the discussion of this idea here).
   a. That's important to remember because, in contrast to chapters 37–45, beginning in chapter 46 and moving forward, the emphasis is more on Jacob.
   b. "They seem to already to be looking toward the Book of Exodus," which in the text is just a few pages away (Brueggemann 1982, 353–354).

4. The episode from 46.28–47.12 has three subunits framed by three dialogue scenes:
   a. Move to Goshen, reuniting/dialogue of Jacob and Joseph, and instructions of Joseph to his brothers.
   b. Pharaoh receives the brothers (dialogue about their occupation) and grant in Goshen (47.1–6).
   c. Pharaoh receives Jacob and dialogue about Jacob's age, framed (vv. 7, 10) by Jacob blessing Pharaoh (47.7–12).

The Move to Goshen: Significant Themes (46.28–34)[1]

5. Though mentioned just once in the section, Judah's name appears prominently in verse 28 where he is the designated go-between for Joseph and Jacob.
   a. Interesting in view of his pleading for Benjamin (44.18–34) and growing influence (cf. 49.8–10).
   b. It is especially interesting when we recall his prominent role in breaking the union between the two

[1] The touching reunion between Jacob and Joseph was addressed in a previous study led by my co-teacher of this series and so is only mentioned here.

initially (cf. 37.26–28) (Mathews 2003, loc 22,268).

6. Mention of the name "Israel."
   a. Of the 43 times the name "Israel" appears in Genesis, nine are in chapters 46–47; five of those are in 46.29–30; 47.27, 29, 31.
   b. The appearance of the name in 46.29–30 as the family enters Goshen probably has significance for the impending appearance of the nation-sized people in Exodus (cf. Mathews 2003, loc 22,284).

7. The text also shows an effort to both ensure the Egyptians that the family poses no threat while also highlighting their strategic position for later events.
   a. The place name "Goshen" appears eight times in the unit (46.28–29, 34; 47.1, 4, 6, 27).
   b. It is located on the northeast edge of Egypt in the Nile Delta.
   c. Structural use and emphasis:
      1) It frames the first subunit (vv. 28–29, 34).
      2) It's also featured in the subsequent subunit (vv. 1, 4, 6) and again in the summary regarding the family in 47.27–31 (cf. v. 27).
   d. It's the centerpiece of the request for the land grant received from Pharaoh (46.34; 47.1, 4, 6).[2]

8. But to ensure Pharaoh would allow them to live there, Joseph took steps to show him the benefits that would accrue to Egypt if they did.
   a. He prepares the brothers for a meeting with Pharaoh, including instructions about what they were to say to show that Goshen was the place they should live (vv. 32–34).[3]
   b. Additional assurance of their non-threatening presence stemmed from identifying themselves as "keepers of livestock" (v. 34); they were self-sufficient (Harris 2019, 46.34 n. 28) and were not coming to take Egyptian farmland or get involved in politics (Walton 2009, 133).

9. At the same time, by stressing their desire to live in Goshen, they were also "implying that expansive grazing areas [were] required" (Mathews 2003, loc 22,304).

The Brothers' Audience with Pharaoh (47.1–6)

10. Joseph announces to Pharaoh that his father and brothers "with their flocks and herds and all that they possess" had arrived from Canaan and were in the land of Goshen (47.1).

11. He selects five of his brothers to present to Pharaoh (v. 2); the text does not say why he selects only five or who the five are.[4]

12. In verses 3–4, they emphasize that they were merely shepherds (livestock keepers) and had come only to "sojourn" (גּוּר, *gur*; NET: "live as temporary residents") in the land.
   a. This indicates that they had no designs on jeopardizing the king's future regime.
   b. Mention of it here also points back to God's promise about the time they would spend in Egypt (Gen 15.13) and forward to Exodus when they would leave.

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[2] There were at least three advantages to the Hebrews living in Goshen, though the text does not spell them out. (1) It was the best grazing ground for the flocks and herds, even in the time of famine. (2) They would not be tempted to intermarry with the Egyptians. (3) They would be in an ideal location to escape Egypt when Yahweh was ready to take them back to Canaan, as he had promised (46.4) (Willis 1979, 434–435).

[3] An unspecified attraction was that by living in the frontier area of Goshen through which enemy armies and vagabonds would have to pass, the Hebrews would function as a natural buffer (Willis 1979, 435).

[4] Mathews notes that a Jewish midrash explained that he chose the five weaker brothers (Zebulun, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, and Asher) to avoid the five's conscription into the king's army (e.g., Targum Ps.-J,; Gen. Rab. 95.4) (Matthews 2003, note 468, loc 22,336).

13. Joseph's planned approach to Pharaoh is successful: their request to settle in Goshen is granted and what is in effect a job offer is made to the brothers (vv. 5–6).[5]

The Lord of Egypt Meets the Father of Promise (47.7–12)[6]

14. After his brothers' audience with Pharaoh, "Joseph brought in Jacob his father and stood him before Pharaoh, and Jacob blessed Pharaoh" (v. 7).
    a. Because the content of Jacob's blessing (בָּרַךְ, *bārak̲*) is not revealed, we cannot be definitive about it.
        1) It could simply mean that he greeted Pharaoh, "but that seems insufficient in this setting" (Harris 2019, 47.7 n. 10).
        2) The verb is sometimes used in the sense of praising, whether God or a person, so it could be that Jacob praised Pharaoh (cf. Gen 14.19–20 [where both Abram and God are praised]; 24.48, 60; Deut 8.10).
        3) At the same time, the reference to Jacob blessing Pharaoh, repeated in vv. 7 and 10, "fits with the thematic promise of blessing for the nations in the patriarchal narratives" (Mathews 2003, loc 22,224).
            a) All "families" (12.3; 28.14) or all "nations" (18.18; 22.18; 26.4).
            b) "In Hebrew culture, such formalities assumed an underlying religious significance (e.g., 31.55; Ruth 2.4)" (Mathews 2003, loc 22,380).
    b. Of interest is that this marks the first of several occasions in chapters 47–49 where Jacob is said to bless someone: Pharaoh (47.7, 10), Joseph (48.15; 49.26), Manasseh and Ephraim (48.9, 16, 20), and the twelve sons (49.28) (see Willis 1979, 434).

15. Showing the value for longevity that was common in the ancient Near East, Pharaoh asked about Jacob's age; Jacob answered by emphasizing his "sojourning" (מָגוּר, *māg̲or*) (twice in v. 9).
    a. The term depicts him as one who has lived an unsettled life, temporarily residing in many different places (Harris 2019, 47.9 n 13).
    b. The idea is reinforced by Jacob's reference to the fact that his days had been "few and evil."
        1) "Few" contrasts his life with that of the antediluvians (5.4–32), first postdiluvians (11.10–26), Abraham (175 yrs., 25.7), and Isaac (180 yrs., 35.28); Jacob was 130 then and would live to be 147 (47.28).
        2) "Evil" (רַע, *raʿ*) is used here in the sense of painful (NET), difficult (NIV), and reflects his "hard knock life" (from the musical, *Annie*) experiences: Esau; Laban; grief over the actions of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi; deep grief over Joseph; and anxiety about Benjamin going to Egypt (Willis 1979, 436).

16. Verses 11–12 close the episode: Joseph settles the family and provides for them "in the land of Rameses."
    a. The phrase evidently refers to the district or region where the city of Rameses was located (cf. Exod 1.11; 12.37; Num 33.3, 5).
    b. Egyptian sources indicate that Pharaoh Rameses II (1290–1224 BC) named the city after himself (Willis 1979, 437), which makes the reference to it here puzzling.
    c. Walton notes that, at the time of Joseph, Rameses was not a common name and no city was yet so named. It's logical to postulate that the Genesis author used it here for the benefit of his readers who

[5] Regarding verses 4–6, Mathews comments: "Pharaoh provides Joseph's family complete discretion in selecting 'the best part of the land,' as he had promised (45: 18), but his language is probably ceremonial (e.g., 13: 9; 20: 15) since he designates Goshen, in accord with their previous request (v. 6)" (Mathews 2003, loc. 22,358).

[6] "Lord of Egypt" and "Father of Promise" terminology is taken from Brueggemann 1982, 354.

lived later than Joseph (Walton 2009, 134).[7]

1) It is located in the same area as Goshen, about 65 miles NE of modern Cairo (see note 7 below).

17. Note the irony declared in v. 11: "Joseph … gave them a possession"—"the family called to sojourn now possesses" (Brueggemann 1982, 357).

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[7] Mathews's more detailed comments suggest other possibilities: "'In the land of Rameses' [רַעַמְסֵס, *raʿmᵉsēs*]' identifies the region of Goshen (cf. comments on 45: 10). Ironically, it became known for the store city 'Rame-ses' erected in the area by their descendants under Egyptian slavery (Exod 1: 11; 12: 37; Num 33: 3,5). The identity of the city Rameses is Pi-Ramesses (= modern Qantir, sixty-five mi. northeast of Cairo) in the area between Qanti and el-Khata'na in the northeast Delta region. The site was the royal residence of the Ramesside dynasty of the nineteenth and twentieth dynasties (1295-1065 B.C.). Rameses II especially engaged in elaborate building projects in the area (1279-1212 B.C.), but building occurred earlier in the Middle Kingdom period (2106-1786 B.C.) at Tell ed-Dab'a (= Avaris, capital of the Hyksos, 1640-1530 B.C.), the southern part of Pi-Ramesses. Despite its importance to the nineteenth dynasty, the appearance of 'Rameses' in Genesis and Exodus may be due to a later scribal updating of the location's original name and need not be an indicator of a late date for the events described. Alternatively, some scholars explain that names like Rameses existed during the Hyksos period, long before the nineteenth dynasty, and may well reflect the original name of the site" (Mathews 2023, loc 22,419)