

Genesis 45:16-46:34 God takes care of the future

Introduction

Jigsaw enthusiasts love nothing more than a vast array of pieces spread out before them with a seriously difficult picture to reconstruct. For any who wished the ultimate challenge in such a context it was their duty not to look at the picture which showed the scene they were attempting to reconstruct, but without such an aid to endeavour to resolve the puzzle set before them. In this latter case the task was immeasurably greater, but the ultimate reward of success would be commensurate with it. In our lives as Christians we are often allowed by our heavenly Father to live in this world with this latter perspective –except for the fact that we possess God’s revelation to us in the form of the Scriptures to serve as our guide. As Paul explained in his final letter to the young pastor Timothy at Ephesus: ¹⁴ *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it,* ¹⁵ *and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* ¹⁶ *All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness,* ¹⁷ *so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work* (II Timothy 3:14-17). In His time the Lord can reveal details to us of His purposes, but until such revelation occurs we are called to walk by faith trusting in Him to guide and direct our path each day of our lives. Old Jacob had lived for years in painful confusion torn between trusting God for their future and struggling with his doubts and fears as to what God was doing, not least with respect to his son Joseph. Yet late in his life his sons would return from Egypt with news so extraordinary that he would struggle to believe it. Then and now we are so quick to accept bad news but so reluctant to receive good news of God’s plans and purposes. Maybe we need at times to stop and wonder why this is the case? Proverbs 16:9 states: *In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps.* This was true for Jacob and his family then but equally so for us today. The timing of so many events appears surprising to us, but with hindsight often – not all the time- we can see why God has worked in particular ways at those times in history- or even in our lives. It is also true for those who appear to be all-powerful as human authorities. Proverbs 21:1 declares: *In the Lord’s hand the king’s heart is a stream of water that He channels towards all who please Him.* It is not Prime Minister David Cameron or First Minister Alex Salmon who is ultimately in charge in our country or some other named rulers overseas. Do we need to be reminded of that in a year when a vote over possible ‘independence’ for Scotland takes place? The whole situation in Egypt with the Muslim Brotherhood figure who became President Morsi is a salutary lesson of the complexities of divine providence! God is in ultimate control.

This news recorded in Genesis 45 of Pharaoh’s welcome to Jacob and his family appears too good to be true, but it is not, because God is in control. The God who will call the Persian ruler Cyrus His anointed one and shepherd (Isaiah 44:28-45:1) who will set the Israelites free and return them to their homeland centuries later is in control of the affairs of His people in each and every generation. This is most reassuring for us today I trust!

1. The Offer from Pharaoh (Genesis 45:16-20)

(a) A Solemn Promise (Genesis 45:17-18) *When the news reached Pharaoh’s palace that Joseph’s brothers had come, Pharaoh and all his officials were pleased.* ¹⁷ *Pharaoh said to Joseph, ‘Tell your brothers, “Do this: load your animals and return to the land of Canaan,* ¹⁸ *and bring your father and your families back to me. I will give you the best of the land of Egypt and you can enjoy the fat of the land.”* Joseph has first invited his family to come and live in Egypt, but Pharaoh has

overall control over immigration, like everything else, and he chooses not only to ratify Joseph's invitation but to extend it in a display of unparalleled generosity. However, Joseph had saved his empire from ruin and secured the future of his government. No wonder Pharaoh was so supportive of this proposal. There is much information of this era of Egyptian history that has perished. Exact dates for Joseph and his family's move to Egypt are not known, not can we be certain of the exact date of the Exodus under Moses a few centuries later, because of the complexities of dating systems, together with a scarcity of surviving documents from that period of time. However, the Joseph story took place in the time of the Hyksos rulers of Egypt, a foreign Semitic dynasty that ruled from around 1700BC to 1567BC. The Hyksos people came from Turkey and occupied significant parts of northern Egypt. Their capital city was at Tanis in the Delta region. Goshen was a fertile and attractive location nearby under their control. The native Egyptians of northern Egypt were extremely xenophobic and despised foreigners who came to live in their country. However, being fellow Semites, it is easy to see how a Hyksos Pharaoh would welcome them as they would both mutually benefit from this arrangement. By contrast, native Egyptians would resent foreigners being allocated the most desirable locations in the region for their settlements and over time such unchecked hatred naturally resulted in the enslavement of minorities when a later native dynasty regained the throne. The bigger picture described here was not known to any of the participants in Joseph's day, but the hand of God at work in saving and preserving the descendants of Israel (Jacob) is abundantly clear as we look closely at this story.

(b) **A Visible Promise** (Genesis 45:19-20)¹⁹ *'You are also instructed to tell them, "Do this: take some carts from Egypt for your children and your wives, and get your father and come. ²⁰Never mind about your belongings, because the best of all Egypt will be yours.'* Jacob had no difficulty in accepting (Genesis 37:33-36) that Joseph had been killed. Possibly because of that he had real problems now accepting that Joseph was alive and well in Egypt (Genesis 45:26). *They told him, 'Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.'* Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. The parallel here to the first Easter weekend when the disciples of Jesus first with reluctance accepted that Jesus had in fact died and their dreams were crushed. It was all over! Yet following His various appearances on Easter Sunday and in the weeks that followed the disciples gradually grasped that what God had planned was totally outside anything they had anticipated for the fulfilment of His purposes. It was no different for Jacob. It was not his country. The idea that Pharaoh would send government vehicles to transport him and his animals to Egypt was impossible. This is as likely as the Presidents of France or America inviting you or me to dinner one day! It doesn't happen –well normally it doesn't happen, but this time it was different because it was all part of God's plan for this family. From a position of living close to the breadline the head of the regional superpower invites them to leave their meagre possessions behind and enjoy their pick of the finest goods of Egypt. God had promised to take care of this family. It was dysfunctional and had been a disaster; on the surface the idea that they could accomplish anything worthwhile seemed impossible. Yet God turned them around into a cohesive family unit of individuals who carried out His will on earth. But the blessings only came after their obedience to His revealed will. There was no sign of the blessings while they lived in disobedience. There is a clear lesson for us individually and for us as a church family. Only when we honour God and step out in faith for Him will we see the blessings He has in store for us. Until that time He will withhold them –for as long as it takes. Have you or me or our church family missed out on any blessings from God because of our failure to take God at His Word? I genuinely don't know the answer, but we need at times to stop and ask the question because it is important to do so.

2. The Provisions from Joseph (Genesis 45:21-28)

(a) **The Gifts** (Genesis 45:21-23) ²¹ *So the sons of Israel did this. Joseph gave them carts, as Pharaoh had commanded, and he also gave them provisions for their journey.* ²² *To each of them he gave new clothing, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred shekels of silver and five sets of clothes.* ²³ *And this is what he sent to his father: ten donkeys loaded with the best things of Egypt, and ten female donkeys loaded with grain and bread and other provisions for his journey.* Joseph had first invited his brothers to eat with him and share his generous hospitality. This act of kindness and the incidents around that visit to Egypt eventually led to the reconciliation of the brothers, but their father still had to wait a little longer to receive this good news. The generosity of Joseph to His brothers was matched by Jesus when He called Simon Peter to follow Him, recorded by Luke in Luke 5:4-11: *When He had finished speaking, He said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'* ⁵ *Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.'* ⁶ *When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.* ⁷ *So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.* ⁸ *When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'* ⁹ *For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken,* ¹⁰ *and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.* *Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.'* ¹¹ *So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.* The principle for us is stated by Paul in Philippians 4:19: *And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus.* Yet it goes further in the words of Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:20-21: *Now to Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us,* ²¹ *to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.* God honours those that honour Him. How might He be seeking that do that with you or me or us as a church family this year?

(b) **The Warning** (Genesis 45:24) ²⁴ *Then he sent his brothers away, and as they were leaving he said to them, 'Don't quarrel on the way!'* The reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers had gone so well, but they, and we, are imperfect human beings. However, great the heights we scale, we are still equally capable of making mistakes and our known character weaknesses –if we don't work on them- are liable to show up when the pressure is on. Did the brothers reconcile with Joseph only because of his status as Vizier of Egypt? Or was their transformation genuine? The real test was still before them. The easy bit was telling their father that Joseph was alive. The hard part was explaining how he ended up in Egypt. The sordid tale of their selling little brother as a slave and the deception of Jacob that followed it would all come out. Who was responsible? Who should take the blame? Did they know that Jacob had conned his elderly father Isaac and cheated his brother Esau out of his inheritance? In life people can appear to get away with wrongdoing but in many cases –not all- circumstances remarkably similar can be their later experience. I have been aware over the years of a number of examples where this has happened in families. Wrongs that have never been put right later come back to overshadow many people's lives. However, in God's family we proclaim and hopefully live a gospel of grace and forgiveness –if our profession of faith has serious credibility. This means addressing issues from the past and closing those chapters of our lives and then being freed to move forward in the rest of our lives. Would these brothers have the courage to admit their mistakes and in this case their sin to their father? James in chapter four of his letter to early Christian congregations raised this problem experienced in their ranks and suggested how this difficulty could be addressed. James 4:1-3 states the problem: *What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?* ² *You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what*

you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. Later James 4:6-10 provides the solution. ⁶ But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: 'God opposes the proud but shows favour to the humble.' ⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. ⁸ Come near to God and He will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom. ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up. The key words here are *grace* and *humility*. Our relationship with God is based on His underserved love and mercy to us, therefore, grace should likewise be the basis on which we relate to one another as fellow Christians. In terms of our view of self and our place within God's family, the second (character) quality mentioned here *humility* is the key. A right view of self based on a right understanding of our relationship with God will enable us to have good relationships with one another. A community of faith characterised by cliques or people not talking to others is not only dysfunctional but one where individuals are failing to grasp a right understanding of what it means to follow Jesus. The impact of the collective witness of such a church will be significantly diminished in their community. Joseph knew that this journey home and the conversations that would take place amongst his brothers was crucial for their collective future. The past could not be changed, but the future could and should be different.

(c) **The Message** (Genesis 45:25-28) ²⁵ So they went up out of Egypt and came to their father Jacob in the land of Canaan. ²⁶ They told him, 'Joseph is still alive! In fact, he is ruler of all Egypt.' Jacob was stunned; he did not believe them. ²⁷ But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived. ²⁸ And Israel said, 'I'm convinced! My son Joseph is still alive. I will go and see him before I die.' It was no surprise that Jacob took some convincing of the truth of their revelations to him. Not least because it had flatly contradicted everything they had said to him over more than two decades. There were two things that clinched it for Jacob, recorded in Genesis 45:27. **First** of all: *But when they told him everything Joseph had said to them...* Did they have a few attempts to tell the story? Did they gloss over the worst parts to begin with? Or did they come clean and own up to everything in the telling of the story the first time through? I would like to think they took a deep breath and owned up to everything that happened, but all we can be certain of is that they reported accurately all that Joseph had asked them to share with their father. Something about this account rang true with Jacob. Maybe the sincerity of their apologies, confessing their sin and owning up to what they had done allowed things to fit into place and dispel the clouds of confusion that had overshadowed their lives for years? However, a **second** thing provided the confirmation for Jacob: *and when he saw the carts Joseph had sent to carry him back, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.* We might have a vision of simple oxen-pulled carts that were presumed to be common at the time. This would be incorrect. The picture here is of the best removal vehicles at Pharaoh's disposal that everyone in the neighbourhood turned out to see. Jacob knew that his sons, like their father, were very capable of lying and deceiving each other, but the provision of this means of transport was outside their available options. The message they had brought had to be true- Joseph was alive! The old man could now die in peace sensing that God's purposes were being fulfilled, like old Simeon in the Jerusalem Temple when he held the baby Jesus. Luke 2:28-32: *Simeon took Him in his arms and praised God, saying: ²⁹ 'Sovereign Lord, as You have promised, You may now dismiss Your servant in peace. ³⁰ For my eyes have seen Your salvation, ³¹ which You have prepared in the sight of all nations: ³² a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Your people Israel.'* The details were no longer important to these elderly men, simply the revelation that God was in control, that He was fulfilling His promises and that they had been privileged to play a small part in their accomplishment. You and I too have our small part to

play in our generation. We may never realise how significant our part is, but are content to grasp that God alone can determine that point. Our calling is simply to be obedient men and women who do what He asks us to do –and sometimes, just sometimes- we catch a glimpse of the bigger picture, like a patch of blue sky on a cloudy day and thank God for that privilege. We need to keep before us the fact that we are part of something far bigger than our finite minds can grasp. The Creator and Redeemer and Sustainer of the Universe has called us into His family and plans to use each one of His children to play their part in the fulfilment of His eternal purposes. Our responsibility is to trust our heavenly Father with the bigger picture and keep our focus on the next small or large step of faith He has called us to take. Will we do that this year?

3. The Revelation to Jacob (Genesis 46:1-4)

(a) **Jacob's Prayer** (Genesis 46:1) *So Israel set out with all that was his, and when he reached Beersheba, he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac.* Why might Jacob have refused to take this big step of faith? (i)He was an old man Normally, the older we are the more reluctant we are to accept changes. Younger people find change both easier and more desirable and even exciting. I'm 130 years old. It's too much to expect me to supportive of change. Yet this choice was not really for him but for his children and grandchildren's generation. As we get older we need to accept this truth. Praise God that Jacob did! (ii)Egypt was a heathen country It might be more desirable in material or economic terms, but it was not a place where God's name was honoured. The people worshipped an array of gods that might entice his family to go astray. After all it was hard enough keeping his family on the right tracks in Canaan let alone allowing them to grow up in a foreign land. It was so easy to pile up the objections to this plan, rather than accept that God had provided this opportunity. It was a question of trust. (iii)Egypt was synonymous with bad memories for his family Abraham had gone there in a time of famine and got into all kinds of trouble with the Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10-20). Possibly the difficulties with nephew Lot had come about as a result of that choice. Could the same happen again? Fast forward a generation to his father Isaac. Once more there was a famine in Canaan. What did God say to Isaac? Genesis 26:2-6 states: ²*The Lord appeared to Isaac and said, 'Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. ³Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, ⁵because Abraham obeyed me and did everything I required of him, keeping my commands, my decrees and my instructions.'* ⁶*So Isaac stayed in Gerar.* God's blessing on Isaac came about because he didn't go to Egypt. The circumstances on that previous occasion were so similar yet God's message was the opposite to Jacob. Previously the answer had been 'no' to Egypt, now it was 'yes'. Jacob as an older man could so easily have said well God said no before, therefore it is always no to Egypt. Yet had he reasoned in that manner he would have been profoundly wrong. God's guidance can be 'yes' 'no' or 'not yet' both then in the past and now in the present day. (iv)Did Jacob know this event was the fulfilment of the prophecy God gave to Abraham, recorded in Genesis 15:12-16? It states: *As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. ¹³Then the Lord said to him, 'Know for certain that for four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own and that they will be enslaved and ill-treated there. ¹⁴But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterwards they will come out with great possessions. ¹⁵You, however, will go to your ancestors in peace and be buried at a good old age. ¹⁶In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure.'* We will never know whether Jacob was

familiar with these words or even if he was that he realised their significance at this time. What is important is that this elderly patriarch set an example to all his extended family in trusting God and embracing the future option placed before them. He took the initiative in prayer and worship. Undoubtedly it was right to keep close to God in personal and public devotions, setting an example for his family. Was this a service to close the past chapter of their lives, confessing past sin and doubt and asking God for strength and grace to face the future? It is possible even probable that this was the case. What is crucial here is that Jacob took this step of faith before God confirmed the rightness of this course of action and assured him of future blessings. We have to grasp this lesson. We must never forget that *we walk by faith not by sight* (II Corinthians 5:7). Is God placing a step of faith before us individually or collectively this year? Remember the example of Jacob.

(b) **God's Revelation** (Genesis 46:2-4) ²*And God spoke to Israel in a vision at night and said, 'Jacob! Jacob!' 'Here I am,' he replied. ³'I am God, the God of your father,' He said. 'Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again. And Joseph's own hand will close your eyes.'* The name synonymous with past mistakes and fears would become the place of blessing. (i)**God called him by name** It was personal –our faith journey with God is personal and collective, not either /or. (ii) **God's call was in the context of His covenant** *I am God, the God of your father...* Each generation has a major faith step to take but in the context of the faithfulness of God who keeps His promises to us. (iii)**God's call was to go forward with confidence** *Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt.* Jacob I did previously say 'no' to Isaac, it was not the right time. But now it is 'yes' –it is not a change of mind by God simply a matter of timing. There are times when we have no doubt as to God's will in a situation yet the door of opportunity does not open for us –there is a real possibility that God is saying 'not yet', but the time will come when a decisive step of obedience to go forward will be required to honour Him. (iv)**God promises to go with him** *I will go down to Egypt with you...* This is always crucial then and now. Moses was very clear on this point during the exodus wanderings. Exodus 33:14-15: *The Lord replied, 'My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'* ¹⁵*Then Moses said to Him, 'If Your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.* As new covenant people we have the same assurance from the Lord (Matthew 28:20; Hebrews 13:5b-6). (v)**God's promise for him** *for I will make you into a great nation there.* The key word of the promise was *there*. Steps of faith from Jacob (and us) are required before we get the blessings God has planned for us. Are we willing to step out in faith with God this year?

4. **The Reconciliation with Joseph** (Genesis 46:5-34)

Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. ⁶So Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt, taking with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan. ⁷Jacob brought with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters – all his offspring. ⁸These are the names of the sons of Israel (Jacob and his descendants) who went to Egypt: Reuben the firstborn of Jacob. ⁹The sons of Reuben: Hanok, Pallu, Hezron and Karmi. ¹⁰The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jakin, Zohar and Shaul the son of a Canaanite woman. ¹¹The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath and Merari. ¹²The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez and Zerah (but Er and Onan had died in the land of Canaan). The sons of Perez: Hezron and Hamul. ¹³The sons of Issachar: Tola, Puah, Jashub and Shimron. ¹⁴The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon and Jahleel. ¹⁵These were the sons Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, besides his daughter Dinah. These sons and daughters of his were thirty-three in all. ¹⁶The sons of Gad: Zephon, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi and Areli. ¹⁷The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their sister was Serah. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malkiel. ¹⁸These were the children born to Jacob by Zilpah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Leah – sixteen in all. ¹⁹The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin.

²⁰ In Egypt, Manasseh and Ephraim were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphera, priest of On. ²¹ The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Beker, Ashbel, Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim and Ard. ²² These were the sons of Rachel who were born to Jacob – fourteen in all. ²³ The son of Dan: Hushim. ²⁴ The sons of Naphtali: Jahziel, Guni, Jezer and Shillem. ²⁵ These were the sons born to Jacob by Bilhah, whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel – seven in all. ²⁶ All those who went to Egypt with Jacob – those who were his direct descendants, not counting his sons' wives – numbered sixty-six persons. ²⁷ With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all. ²⁸ Now Jacob sent Judah ahead of him to Joseph to get directions to Goshen. When they arrived in the region of Goshen, ²⁹ Joseph had his chariot made ready and went to Goshen to meet his father Israel. As soon as Joseph appeared before him, he threw his arms around his father and wept for a long time. ³⁰ Israel said to Joseph, 'Now I am ready to die, since I have seen for myself that you are still alive.' ³¹ Then Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'I will go up and speak to Pharaoh and will say to him, "My brothers and my father's household, who were living in the land of Canaan, have come to me. ³² The men are shepherds; they tend livestock, and they have brought along their flocks and herds and everything they own." ³³ When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, "What is your occupation?" ³⁴ you should answer, "Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did." Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians.' When young Jacob was heading off to Syria to stay with his mother's relatives God gave him a promise. In Genesis 28:15 it states: *I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.* Here in Genesis 46:3 with reference to the nation of Israel, his descendants, God makes a similar promise: *Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for I will make you into a great nation there. ⁴ I will go down to Egypt with you, and I will surely bring you back again.* Did God keep His promise? Yes He did, in line with the prophetic word to Abraham, it was more than 400 years later, but in God's time it happened. Then and now God's people can struggle with patience in waiting God's time for events to take place, but what He has decreed will happen, because God takes care of the future. In Goshen (Genesis 46:29) there was the moving reconciliation with Joseph. The family of Israel had to let go of the little oasis where they lived near Beersheba to travel across a lot of desert, but their inheritance in Egypt was more fertile and suitable for their needs. For the elderly patriarch the pieces of the jigsaw were being assembled as he saw the hand of God at work. There was still a long way to go before the land was truly inherited and settled under Joshua and later King David's rule, but what they and we today need to grasp firmly is that God keeps His promises in His timescale and guarantees to take care of our future, for His name's sake. Amen.