

## READ

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Genesis 46 - 47:25

## REFLECT

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Two very important and consequential events take place in this chapter and a half – Jacob’s whole family moved to Egypt and Joseph used the famine to buy up land, animals, and people, thereby consolidating power for Pharaoh. While neither by itself meant all that much, combined it set the stage for perhaps the most significant event in the history of the people of Israel – the Egyptian captivity and subsequent escape. Every later event of the Old Testament is seen through the lens of God having delivered the people from slavery, and it’s these two events that set things in motion.

Jacob began his journey to Egypt by first going to Beer-Sheba and worshipping God. This was the site of Abraham’s covenant with Abimelech and the place Isaac had heard God’s promise to him. Jacob had also been through Beer-Sheba, it was a place with much significance. There God spoke to him, assuring him that in Egypt he’d be made great and that he’d be led back out. With that assurance, Jacob and his whole family left. Every person of that family is named – 70 people in all, an important number because 70 represents an idea of perfect completeness (7 being the number of days of creation and 10 being understood to be complete – no numbers are accidents in Hebrew). Jacob’s caravan finally arrived, he was reunited with his long-lost son, and things seem to be great. Joseph devised a plan to ensure Pharaoh would give them the land they needed in Goshen, and it went off without a hitch. Jacob even received an audience with Pharaoh (in which we learn he was then 130 years old) and Jacob offered Pharaoh a blessing. They got settled in their new home and everything was comfortable.

As the famine dragged on, Joseph used the dire circumstances to gain an iron grip on power. Every bit of silver was used to buy grain, then the people traded their livestock, then their land and themselves as indentured servants – all because they were hungry. Through it all the people were never bitter, they were just happy to be able to eat. This consolidation of power meant that Pharaoh owned *everything*, and that kind of power can do bad things.

## REACT

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- With the gift of hindsight, we can see that the history of the people of Israel would be forever shaped by the events we've just read. The same is true in our own lives. Have you stopped to think about what caused certain events to take place? Have you thought about what might have been done differently to prevent a certain outcome? How have you learned from the past?
- Jacob didn't want to travel without first worshipping the God who'd promised him so much goodness. In that worship he was assured that 1) he'd be made into a great nation, and 2) God would bring his family out of Egypt. Both promises were kept, though not in the way Jacob might have expected. One might blame God for promising something and fulfilling it only after the people lived through a literal Hell. Is God to blame, or did Jacob and his descendants have agency to make choices that could have brought about a more pleasant end?
- Joseph's consolidation of power seems like an overreach. Who among us would want to give up out bank accounts, property, and lives to our government? The Egyptians did it gladly to be able to eat and forever felt indebted to Pharaoh. The power Pharaoh wielded after this made him much like a dictator. How might later events played out if Pharaoh hadn't been given so much control?

## RESPOND

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**Aligning our steps with God's plans:** *God's promised Jacob this at Beer-Sheba – "Don't be afraid to go down to Egypt because I will make a great nation of you there. I will go down to Egypt with you, and I promise to bring you out again." We have inherited a similar promise – that God will be with us and bring us into God's eternal realm of justice and peace. How we get to that promise, though, depends on our own choices and how well we can hear God's voice and follow where it leads. We so often believe our choices are inconsequential, but there is never a moment when God is not calling us, every moment matters. Practice paying attention to the small choices you make each day. Where is God in that choice? Is what you normally do without thinking where God is calling you?*