

Jacob/Israel Settles in Goshen

This evening we will consider this genealogy that we find in Genesis 46:8-27 and then the part of the story in which Jacob and his family end up in Goshen. Goshen was a part of the land of Egypt. The theological theme in both of these sections has to do with how God was making the offspring of Abraham into a great nation. We began looking at that subject last week when we considered Genesis 46:1-7. The verses that we are going to consider this evening give a few additional insights into this subject.

So first the genealogy. There are a lot of problems with the numbers. They don't add up in a number of places. It is very difficult to know who is included and who is not included in some of the numbers that are given. For instance, in verse 15, it says that the sons and daughters of Leah numbered thirty-three, but there are thirty-four names given. But we're not sure which names to count. Two of Judah's sons, Er and Onan, had died back in Canaan. They are on the list but it is not clear that they are counted in the number 33. Only one daughter is mentioned by name, but verse 15 speaks of daughters. Does the 33 include other daughters who for some reason are not on the list or does the 33 include only sons? There is one name on this list which is not included when this genealogy is repeated in the books of Numbers and 1st Chronicles. Some scholars think that his name was probably a scribal error. So, it is impossible to know how Moses came up with the number thirty-three for the sons and daughters of Leah.

There are many different attempts at solutions. There may be problems with the transmission of the text – mistakes could have been made in the transmission of the text through the centuries. That is not inconsistent with the doctrine of the inerrancy of Scripture because inerrancy is only claimed for the original copy, not the copies that followed. It could also be that we just don't know who was included in the number 33. Perhaps Dinah was not included in the 33 and only the heads of families were included. It may be that there was no attempt to be completely accurate in

these genealogies. It is known for sure that in other genealogies that certain names are left out.

In the case of this genealogy it seems that what was most important was the number seventy that is given as the total number of those who came to Egypt. This number is given in verse 27. Seventy is a symbolic number. The ESV Study Bible says, "Perhaps 70 is treated here as a round number, representing the ideal, conveying the idea that all Israel went down to Egypt." And Bruce Waltke in his commentary writes, "The nation in miniature is represented as the ideal and complete number."

The number 70 seems to be a number of completeness. In Numbers 11:16 reference is made to 70 men of the elders of Israel. The 70 represent all of Israel. That happens a number of time in the writings of Moses. The number 70 was a number that signified completeness and so in this case by saying that 70 persons of the house of Jacob went down to Egypt, Moses is making the point that the entire people of God left Canaan and moved to Egypt. This is the entire number of the nation of Israel at this point.

But the names were also important. Moses could have just said that the family that moved to Egypt numbered 70 people. He did not have to list all the names. But he did. It was important for the generations that followed that they know which tribe to which they belonged. In Genesis you have Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and then the twelve sons of Jacob and all of Israel were descendants of those twelve sons. The descendants of the twelve sons made up the 12 tribes of Israel. Later on, the priests would come from the line of Levi. The kings including the Messiah would come from the tribe of Judah. And when Israel came to the promised land, the land was divided up according to the tribes. These genealogies made it possible for later Israelites to know which tribe they belonged to.

Generally, these genealogies enabled the offspring of Abraham to know that they were offspring of Abraham. Remember the promises that God had made to Abram. They included his offspring. God had promised to make a great nation of Abram. In

Genesis 15 God says to Abram, "To your offspring I give this land." In Genesis 17:7 God says, "And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you."

You see the importance of offspring in the promises that God made to Abram. Abram and his offspring were the bearers of the promises. Biological descent was the way that the promise moved through the generations. That is not to say that all of those offspring were saved people. The history shows that many of them were not. But they were a people set apart. They were the people through whom God was going to bless all the nations. And so, these genealogies were important because it was important for the people of Israel to be able to trace their ancestry back to Abram.

One article on the significance of these genealogies writes, "Such records were compiled to authenticate hereditary succession and inheritance rights, biological descent, and geographical or ethnological relationships." (The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised, Vol. 2, p. 424).

It was important for the people of Israel to be able to trace their ancestry back to the sons of Jacob and thus back to Abraham. Those who were the biological descendants of Abraham were the covenant people of God. That was not automatic salvation. It meant being recipients of the promises and it meant being called to faith and repentance. But it was a tremendous blessing. This was the people that God had chosen to be his people and through whom he was going to bless the world.

There are both similarities and differences when we come to the NT. The people of God are no longer a specific nation. Paul teaches us that we become offspring of Abraham through being united to Jesus Christ by faith. Galatians 3:7, "Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham." Since Christ has come and the division between Jew and Gentile has been taken away, we become offspring of Abraham through faith. In Ephesians 2 Paul writes that before the time of Christ, Gentiles were "alienated

from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.”

This does not mean that biology is no longer important. Now the promises are to believers and their offspring. As Peter said on the day of Pentecost, “the promise is for you and for your children.” But genealogies are no longer important. There is no advantage to being physically descended from Abraham. The offspring of Abraham are those who believe in Jesus and their children.

So, when we look at this list of names we are reminded that this group of people, the offspring of Abraham, were the recipients of the promises of God, but also the claims of God upon their lives. These were the chosen people, the people whom God had chosen to be the people through whom his plan for the salvation of the world would be fulfilled. This people was set apart by God to be his people and to be the agents of salvation to the rest of the world. They were called to demonstrate in their lives the blessedness of belonging and serving God and the blessedness of obedience to God’s laws.

Later on, after God had delivered his people from Egypt he said to them, "6“For you are a people holy to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. 7It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt." (Deuteronomy 7:6-8)

The genealogy that enumerates the family of Jacob in our text were the people of God in their generation. They were holy to the Lord. They were God’s treasured possession. They were the people of the promise. One of the thing that this list does is distinguish them from the rest of the world. These are the people of God. Those who were not represented by this list, were “alienated from

the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world” to use Paul’s language in Ephesians 2.

This is still true of the church today – Christ followers and their offspring. Peter speaks of this in 1 Peter 2:9-10 with reference to the NT church. "9But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy."

What a great blessing this is! We are God’s chosen people. We are set apart from the people of the world to be the people of God in our generation. We are the recipients of the promises of God, but also the calling of God – “to proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.” Like the ancient people of Israel, we are called to faith and repentance and obedience. We are richly blessed. We have a most significant role to play in the plan of God for the salvation of the world. We are to tell the world of Jesus. We are to make disciples of all nations. We are to demonstrate by our lives, the wonder of God and his grace. And we are chosen to belong to this people. There is a difference here between OT and NT. In the OT, the biological connection to Abram was very significant. That biological connection is no longer significant. The NT teaches that by faith we become joined to the chosen people by being joined to Christ who is the Seed of Abraham. We believe that the children of believers are included in the covenant people of God. But even though we become the spiritual offspring of Abraham through faith, the NT still calls us the chosen people. As Peter puts it “you are a chosen race.” Faith is a gift of God. God chooses the people to whom he is going to give faith. That is election.

Believers and their children are a chosen people. Just like the genealogy of Genesis 46 is the list of the chosen people in that generation, so today believers and their children are God’s chosen people today. That does not mean that we are superior to others

in any way. But it does mean that we are blessed above others. In Deuteronomy 7:17 God says to Israel, "You shall be blessed above all peoples." Ephesians 1:3-4 says of the church, "[God] has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world...."

But with blessing comes responsibility. We are to be a blessing to the world. It is through Christ and his people that the world is to be blessed. We are blessed above others, not so that we can gloat, but so that we can be a blessing to others and seek to add them to the number of those who are known to be chosen by God. As we look at the genealogy of Genesis 46 in the light of the NT, we see a people chosen by God for salvation and to be a blessing to the world. Through faith in Jesus Christ we belong to that people in our generation.

This speaks to our identity. Our identity is our self-concept – our understanding of who we are and our place in the world. It is informed by such things as our sex and the family from which we come and our jobs and our strengths and weaknesses and so on. Our self-concept is very important. It influences our behaviour and our expectations and our sense of where we fit in the world. This genealogy was important for the identity of the generations that followed. They know who they were by tracing their ancestors back to one of the sons of Jacob and through those sons back to Abraham. They knew that they belonged to this chosen people to whom God had promised to be their God and through whom he was going to save the world.

As believers in Jesus together with our children we are part of that chosen people. That is the most important part of our identity. It is more important than our sex or our nationality or our jobs. This defines us as the people of God who are the recipients of the promises and obligations of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We belong to the people of God. That is the most significant belonging that we can have. Our identity as people of God means that we are a people set apart to sing the praises of God, to be holy, to be

thankful and to be a blessing to the world by word and by deed. This is who we are. And it tells us why we are.

The next part of the story tells us about the arrival of Jacob and his family in Egypt and in particular it tells us how Jacob and his family ended up settling in what the text calls, "the land of Goshen." They settled in the land of Goshen because they were shepherds. Presumably the land of Goshen was good pastureland, at least when there was no famine. But what the text mentions is that they settled in the land of Goshen "for every shepherd is an abomination to the Egyptians."

This is interesting and significant. What it did was make a separation between the family that was to become the nation of Israel and the Egyptians. God had brought his people to Egypt that there they might become a great nation and one of the things that this accomplished was to provide a place where they were separated from the people around them. Because of their occupation as shepherds they were an abomination to the Egyptians and that hatred kept them from mixing in among the Egyptians. It forced them to live in a separate area and the result was that they could grow into a distinct nation from the Egyptians. Back in the land of Canaan, they were in danger of mixing with the Canaanites. The genealogy above mentions that one of the sons of Simeon was the son of a Canaanite woman. We know from Genesis 38 that Judah had married a Canaanite woman and had children with her. It seems that in Canaan the children of Jacob were in danger of being assimilated into the Canaanite people among whom they lived. If that intermarrying with the Canaanites continued, within a few generations there would be no separate holy people left. The line of promise would be absorbed into the Canaanites and disappear.

So, God brought them to Egypt where there was this great barrier to them blending in. The Egyptians did not like shepherds. Shepherds were an abomination to the Egyptians. And so, the family of Jacob was given a separate area in which to live. They were kept apart from the Egyptians. And there they multiplied and

became a great nation. Their separation kept them from being assimilated into the Egyptian nation.

This continues to be an important theme in the history of Israel. One of the reasons for all the strange laws of cleanness and uncleanness in the OT was to keep the people of Israel separate from the nations. In Leviticus 20:26, after reiterating the distinction between clean and unclean animals, God said “You shall be holy to me, for I the LORD am holy and have separated you from the peoples, that you should be mine.” Earlier on in that chapter God had said to Israel, Verse 23, “And you shall not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, for they did all these things, and therefore I detested them.”

This is an important biblical theme – the separateness of the people of God from the world around them. It continues in the NT except now the people of God is a transnational people. The people of God come from all the nations. The offspring of Abraham are those who believe in Jesus from every nation together with their children. But the idea of separation is still very important – separation from the world – from unbelievers. When Jesus prayed to his Father in John 17 he said of his disciples, “They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world” (John 17:16). In 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 Paul tells the Corinthian Church, “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteous with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord as Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever?” And then he says, “Therefore go out from their midst and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch no unclean thing...”

This has always been a problem for the people of God – the danger of being influenced by the world and being assimilated into the world and eventually becoming the world. In both the OT and NT God tells his people to maintain a separation from the world. The concern is always that the people of God will be negatively influenced by the world and eventually become indistinguishable from the world.

In Romans 12:2, Paul tells his readers, “Do not be conformed to this world.” In 1 John 2:15, John warns, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

What does this mean for us? It no longer means a physical separation as we see with the family of Jacob in Egypt. In John 17:15 Jesus said to his Father, “I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one.” In verse 18 he says, “As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world.” In Matthew 5 Jesus call his disciples the “salt of the earth” and the “light of the world.” And God’s promise to Abraham was that his offspring would be a blessing to the world. So, there is a tension between separation from the world and our calling to be a blessing to the world. But it is not a real tension because the separation from the world and the mission to the world work together. Our separation from the world is a moral and spiritual separation. We are involved in the life of the world, but we are not to live by the same values of the world. Our greatest love and passion must be God and his kingdom. Our greatest priorities are to be obedience and service. We are to be very different from the world in moral purity, honesty, compassion and priorities. We are to be different from the world in the way that Jesus was different from the world. Being different in this way leads to being a blessing to those around us as Jesus did not live for himself but for others.

So, the separation is necessary in order to be a blessing to the world. We are not to be conformed to the world. That means that we must be very careful about our exposure to the influences from the world. We must be very careful about our exposure to the media and to entertainment and music and the people of the world. Think again of what Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 6. “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers... what fellowship has light with darkness?” Paul is not only speaking about marriage there. It certainly applies to marriage, but it applies to other relationships as well. Paul says that there can be no fellowship between light and darkness. That is not to say that we can have no relationships

with unbelievers, but the purpose must be to bless them with gospel and with deeds of love. The light must be shining into the darkness and not the darkness snuffing out the light.

This theme of separation in the Bible must be taken seriously. Here are some areas where we need to be different. We need to be different in what we treasure. Jesus said, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matthew 6:19-20). We are to be different by not living for ourselves but for Jesus. Paul wrote that Jesus “died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised” (2 Corinthians 5:15). We are to be different by having a certain looseness from this life and looking forward to the next. The book of Hebrews says, “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come” (Hebrews 13:14). We are to be different by embracing our connectedness to and our obligations to the body of Christ. Paul wrote, “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... for the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Corinthians 12:10). We are not independent individuals. We are parts of a body – the body of Christ.

To maintain and to grow in these any many other areas we need to avoid being conformed to the world and instead be continually transformed by the renewing of our minds. We must maintain separation. Not isolation, but separation. There are many things that we must avoid. There are places we may not go. There are behaviors that we may not do. Paul tells us that we “must no longer walk as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their minds” (Ephesians 4:17). He says, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:11).

Christ died so that we might be different. He died to make us a separate people. He died to make us holy. And that requires that we are not conformed to the values, priorities, thought patterns, of the world and that we be continually transformed to the values, priorities, thought patterns of Jesus. We see in our text how God brought Israel the land of Goshen so that there they could be separate from the world around them so as not to be assimilated

into it. That separation was necessary in order for them to fulfill their calling to be a blessing to the world. We are not called to be physically separated from the world, but we are called to be spiritually and morally and ethically separated from the world. We are called to be holy so that as a holy people we can show and tell the world what it needs to see and hear.