

Parashah 11

Vayigash

ויגש

“He approached”

Genesis 44:18 – 47:27

Torah Together



In this week's *Torah* portion, Joseph reveals his identity to his brothers, who he believes have truly had a change of heart. Joseph sends his brothers back to his father, Jacob, with instructions to bring the entire family to live with him in Egypt until the famine is over. Joseph and his father are reunited after twenty plus years and the family takes up residence in Goshen, a fertile hill country well suited to raising livestock.

1. Judah's Offer of Sacrifice - 44:18-34

a) As you read Judah's plea to Joseph, what do you notice about it? What are Judah's reasons for offering to take Benjamin's place?

b) How does Judah's offer indicate a change of heart for him? What has happened in Judah's life that may have caused this? Do you think Joseph saw Judah's change?

c) Who else do we know that offered his life in exchange for a guilty person?

Changes in Judah's Character

We begin to see a change in Judah's character when he was confronted with the pregnancy of his daughter-in-law, Tamar (**Genesis 38**). Now it appears that God has been working on his heart and Judah is willing to sacrifice himself to a life of slavery rather than break his father's heart (again) by returning home without Benjamin.

Scripture Link

It is certainly noble of Judah to offer to take Benjamin's place and remain as a slave in Egypt rather than deprive his father Jacob of his beloved son. **John 15:13** records another notable occurrence of this kind of sacrificial love. Who is the object of this love in each case?

Joseph's Forgiveness

Because of his brother's hatred of him, Joseph had spent many years suffering as a slave. Yet he truly harbored no resentment toward them. At the same time, his brothers had spent many years living with their sin and seeing the pain and suffering they had caused their father. They could not imagine that Joseph would not hate them and seek revenge. What do you think enabled Joseph to keep from hating his brothers?

Joseph's Position in Egypt

Notice that it was not an option for Joseph to join his father in Canaan. In spite of the fact that Joseph was the "Number 2 man" in Egypt, he still served at the pleasure of Pharaoh and, for all practical purposes, was a slave. However, because he was successful at his job of managing Egypt through the famine, Pharaoh was happy for Joseph and graciously invited his entire family to relocate to Egypt. Of course, this had been God's plan all along, as He told Abraham in **Genesis 15:12-16**.

2. Joseph makes himself Known - 45:1-20

a) Why do you think that Joseph could no longer control his emotions?

b) Why do you think his brothers were terrified in his presence?

c) As Joseph begins to hug and kiss his brothers, what does he say that helps relieve their anxiety? How was he able to say this? If you were in his place, could you have done the same?

d) What does Joseph ask that his brothers do? At this point in the story, there is a great deal of information that Joseph's brothers must absorb. Can you imagine the conversations that went on among themselves and with Joseph?

e) What was Pharaoh's reaction to the news that Joseph's brothers had come to Egypt? What did he order Joseph to do?

3. Joseph's Brothers return Home - 45:21-46:5

a) What does Joseph admonish his brothers about in verse 24? Why do you think he may have said this?

b) When his brothers returned to Jacob, they informed him that Joseph was not only alive, but the ruler of all Egypt. Do you think they told Jacob what they had done to Joseph long ago? How do you think Jacob felt about this and how would you have responded?

c) What do you think it means in verse 27 when it says, "the spirit of their father Jacob revived"?

d) On the way to Egypt, Jacob stops at Beer Sheba and offers a sacrifice to God. There God speaks to Jacob in a vision. What does God say to Jacob and how did this encourage him?

4. Israel & his Descendants journey to Egypt - 46:5-47:12

a) Verses 5 - 25 list all the male descendants of Jacob who went to Egypt. How many were there by each wife? Including Jacob, a total of how many went to Egypt? After adding Joseph and his two sons, how many male descendants were in Egypt?

What to tell Jacob

We are not told whether his brothers explained to Jacob how Joseph ended up in Egypt. It's difficult to imagine how they could have said anything other than the truth, especially since Jacob would be reunited with Joseph and he would tell him the whole story. In any case, it appears that the joy of finding that Joseph was alive and that they would be reunited was enough to overshadow any anger or resentment that Jacob might have felt.

Jacob and Deception

The key event in Jacob's life was his deception of his father Isaac to gain his blessing (**Genesis 27**). It appears, however, that he was doubly repaid for this deception. First, he was deceived by Laban into taking Leah as his wife instead of Rachel (**Genesis 29:15-30**). Second, his sons deceived him into believing that his beloved son Joseph was dead, allowing him to mourn bitterly for over 20 years. Certainly deception played a big role in Jacob's life.

Life according to Jacob

Genesis 47:7-10 records a conversation between Jacob and Pharaoh just after Jacob's arrival in Egypt. One can imagine that Jacob must have looked very old because Pharaoh asks him, "How old are you?" Notice his answer: "The years of my pilgrimage are one hundred and thirty. My years have been few and difficult, and they do not equal the years of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Jacob's assessment of his life? "My life has been short and hard."

Joseph continues to deal with the Famine

There are archeological records that support the fact that the Lower Nile Valley did indeed suffer a severe famine sometime during the 19th century bce. There is also evidence that the rulers of the land were able to take ownership of much of the agricultural land at about this same time. While the evidence for these 4000-year old events are subject to debate among scholars, there is no reason to dismiss the story of Joseph as a mere fable or myth.

b) Why do you think Jacob chose Judah to go ahead of them to Goshen? How long had it been since Jacob had seen Joseph? Can you imagine what this reunion was like?

c) The family first settled in Goshen. What do you know about Goshen that would make it an ideal place for Jacob's family to settle? What did Joseph do to assure that his family would be allowed to settle there?

d) The fact that Jacob's family were shepherds may have worked to their advantage in several ways. What were some of them?

"Now the Israelites settled in Egypt"

Genesis 47:27

5. The Famine Continues - 47:13-27

a) As the famine continued, the economy suffered. Trace the stages that the people went through as they tried to survive the famine. Who gained what in this process?

b) Why do you think that the Israelites were able to survive and "increase greatly in number" during this period?

Digging deeper

1. How does **Romans 8:28** apply to the life of Joseph?

2. Does it seem fair to you that Joseph's brothers were not punished for their cruelty to him? What do you think about this?

3. This is the end of Joseph's story. Summarize and analyze it. What guiding principles can you get from it? Examine the following passages for ideas: **Psalms 105:16-23, Acts 7:9-14**

Working out God's Will

The way that God worked in the life of Joseph to bring about the salvation of his entire family is worthy of some consideration. While we may not have the role of saving an entire nation, it is clear that God is able to work in our lives in like manner, using our suffering and misfortune to bring about His will in the lives of others. So what attitude should we have as we go through life? How should we respond when we are facing unpleasant circumstances and God seems nowhere to be found? Trusting in God, that His will for our life is better than anything we might imagine for ourselves is the essence of faith.

For further study, see

Haftarah : Ezekiel 37:15-28

Brit Hadashah : Acts 7:9-16

Jacob's Extended Family Tree (Genesis 46:8-25)

