

Honor veterans for their service to us and to our nation...

This indeed is an amazing place to live because of you.

In all the history of the world there has not been a place of safety and blessing such as this... we are grateful to you and to God.

The Beginnings of a Great Nation and the Unfolding Promise of God

I want to look at this family of Israel that we find in Genesis 46 on their way to Egypt... and make a few observations.

Then I want to relate those observations to our nation today.

Recall, Joseph has seen that his brothers who betrayed him some 22 years ago are repentant.

He has manipulated things such that all his brothers came to him on Egypt.

Now he has revealed himself to them and insists that all of them...

their father, and their families come to Egypt where he can provide for them.

I. Preservation.

vss. 1-7

Jacob and his family have just started out on their way to Egypt.

vs. 2 "Jacob, Jacob" = God is getting his attention. It is the sixth time that God has spoken to him in his life... and the last.

Joseph will live 147 years. Think about it. It is not as if everyone in the Bible is always hearing from God.

In any case, I think it is likely that God speaks aloud to people today about as much as He did then.

Life in God's Kingdom is not about seeking the next awesome spiritual experience...

be it in church, at a concert, at a conference, camp, missions trip, fellowship... whatever.

Life is about listening to God when He speaks and being faithful to Him your whole life...

involves trust, faithfulness, obedience, studying what He says, learning, and it involves hard work and suffering, and joy.

So, God calls and Jacob says, "Here I am." He is simply available to God and he has been humbled.

Life has not been easy for Jacob and his family has been a mess.

He started out grasping, deceiving, struggling for all he got.

And, he was himself treated with contempt by his brother and deceit by his father in law.

He wanted one wife and got four... not that it wasn't partially his own fault.

God wrestled him and changed his name to "Israel" = struggles with God... and life has been a struggle.

His favorite wife, Rachel, died bearing Benjamin.

His children were murderous and deceitful, and sold his beloved favorite son into slavery. He thought Joseph was dead.

This was not your family life today sort of family... in fact there aren't any in the Bible.

By any measure this family began as a disaster.

But God had made a promise to Jacob, named Israel, and that is why God speaks to him at this moment.

Jacob needed a reminder, a reassurance that God was preserving him and keeping that promise.

So God identifies Himself as "the God of your fathers" = the God who makes and keeps His promises.

No doubt Jacob was afraid by the way things had developed, the mess of a family, and now they are moving to Egypt.

So, God says to him, "Do not be afraid..." = It is God's plan. God is going with him and will bring him back.

And, so, Jacob obeys God and takes his family, every one of them, to Egypt.

And, of all the parts of the promise... the one that seems least likely is the one that God repeats.

"I will make you a great nation." = this is the part of the whole chapter that I think merits the most attention.

Think about it... Egypt is a great nation. What is Israel? A dysfunctional family.

But, God has made a promise. He will bring it to pass...

but what kind of nation?

And, what is it that makes this nation great?

And, finally, what makes any nation great?

II. Posterity.

vss. 8-30

What makes up a nation? Buildings? Infrastructure? Commerce? Media? Ideas? Sports teams? No... none of these things.

A nation is made up of people. No people, no nation, no matter how great you think you are.

So, we read of the people who come to Egypt with Israel.

And if you pay attention through these verses you discover that the author can count.

70 men of Israel come to Egypt with their families.

I want to point out two things about this great nation... two things that we can see from these verses in their context.

1. God uses imperfect people. These people at the start of this nation are not nation builders by the world's standard.

They are troubled people with messed up lives... they have problems. But, that is who God uses.

2. God's plans and peoples start small and get big.

This is not just how God sometimes works... this is how He always works. He is the God of small beginnings.

It is 215 years after God made His promise to Abraham... and there are 70 men. Things are moving slowly indeed.

430 years from this moment there will be 600,000 men of Israel who will leave Egypt. At least 2 million people.

Don't ever be discouraged when you feel as if God's work is moving slowly. That is how He works.

And, on the way in this working of God, God gives Jacob the great joy of being reunited with his lost son, Joseph.

God finds ways to encourage us on this journey.

And, what is this nation's wealth? What is their national resource? What do they do?

III. Profession.

vss. 31-34

What sort of nation is this? It is a nation of shepherds...

and throughout all the history of the people of Israel they never stop being a nation of shepherds. It is their chief industry.

When they leave Egypt, God promises them "a land flowing with milk and honey." = a shepherd's paradise.

Though some of them will farm and others will live in cities, there will be warriors and fishermen...

but the majority will always be keepers of animals.

Their greatest king, until the Messiah, will grow up and be trained as a shepherd.

And, the Messiah Himself will ultimately be called the Good Shepherd. And, His last command to Peter will be "feed My sheep."

There is something to this. In the world's way of thinking it is nearly impossible to think of a nation of shepherds as a great nation.

But, in God's plans nothing is more natural. This nation is a picture of God's relationship with people.

Shepherds care for sheep. God cares for His people... and we are supposed to do the same.

So, let us now think for a bit about what it means that this family will become a "great nation."

What makes a nation great?

Is it an auspicious beginning? Promising people, morally upstanding, lots of potential... no.

Is it a constitution wisely written? Is it gifted rulership at the beginning and continuing throughout? no.

Is it an undefeatable army, a roaring economy, and a working social safety net? no.

Is it a nation that impacts the entire world in a way that no one can deny? yes... actually. Israel will do this.

Israel is the most impactful nation in the history of the world. It has changed every other nation.

Why? Because of its special relationship with God and the Messiah who has come from this nation.

Israel is a great nation because of its special relationship with God.

Israel displayed this greatness most clearly when its people were most closely following God.

Israel greatness culminated in the coming of the Messiah to Israel...

and, though many of them rejected Him, he has changed all the world forever.

They have been blessed and have become a blessing to all the nations of the world.

Israel has displayed the glory of God... this makes them a great nation.

How about us... the United States. Are we a great nation?

Well, by any worldly measure we are...

We are wealthy... beyond the imagination of most people in most places at most times.

We are powerful... more powerful than any nation ever in the history of the world.

We have unprecedented marvels... roads, internet, entertainment, government, towering cities, theme parks...

We have microwave ovens, iPhones, credit cards, crocks (shoes made out of petroleum!)

We haven't used horses for our principal means of transportation for 100 years.

We have a constitution that we have mostly followed for 200 years, we still have amazing freedoms.

We have a military that is the envy of the world and could destroy any other military power in the history of the world.

We have people who are masters of finance, industry, and creativity.

It is an amazing nation... a great nation by any worldly measure.

But, are we a great nation according to God's evaluation?

Well, I would say that we don't yet know.

Some of our founders were interested in following God. We were begun as a nation under God.

Many of our citizens have sought to follow God and honor Him... this much is true.

But, we allowed slavery for the first 80 years of our existence. We paid for that sin in the Civil War and we are still paying.

We have worshipped money as a culture from the very beginning... we still are.

We regularly honor Godless dishonorable people and ignore faithful servants of God.

We talk much about trusting in ourselves and little about trusting in God.

So, I think one is forced to admit that with all of our historical opportunity, we haven't amounted to much so far.

We have more riches and more opportunity and more power than any other nation in history...

And we are essentially spending it all on our own glory and comfort.

Most people in this nation are not after God's glory and they are not spending their time and money on God's priorities.

But, we could. Things could change. Whole nations do change.

I read a lot of history. Whole nations do turn around... nations in debt, nations in decline, nations destroying themselves.

15th century England, ruled by the incompetent Henry VI, was deep in debt, immoral, and tearing itself apart in a civil war...

300 years later, after reformation and amazing theological development and a series of revivals...

They started sending missionaries all over the world. Now England is all but spiritually dead again.

What should you and I do? What can we do? Protest? Become a political activist? Boycott Nabisco?

No. First of all, the Bible tells us to not become part of the problem. **1 John 2:15-17**

And, the Bible gives us a mission... and we need to be about that mission.

It has not changed for 2000 years. **Matt. 28:19-20**

Finally, the Bible tells us what was told to Israel some 3000 years ago.

Written for a people who would find themselves in hard times because they ignore God... **2 Chron. 7:12-14**