Jacob Goes to Egypt

At the bank we have a formal strategic plan we put into place about 20 years ago. The plan established high level, long term objectives we wanted to achieve and many of the goals we set were aspirational so some have not yet been met. Our day to day operational tasks are designed to support the long term objectives laid out in the plan and sometimes our priorities may change depending the progress we are making in certain areas of the plan. It is always a challenge to keep our employees focused on both the short term (tactics) and the long term (strategy). Our strategic plan is not carved in stone since business or economic conditions will evolve and we must adjust to changing times. Employees who do not fully grasp our strategic plan sometimes have difficulty adapting to what they perceive to be conflicting direction from management. Jacob must have felt some inner conflict as he prepared to go to Egypt, after all God had promised Canaan as an inheritance for his descendants.

Chapter 45 ended with Joseph’s brothers returning to Jacob with the news that Joseph was alive and Jacob vowed to go to him. Chapter 46 begins with Jacob setting out for Egypt and stopping in Beersheba where he offered sacrifices to God. Beersheba was a significant location for Jacob and his family serving as the southern border of Canaan. It was the site of a treaty between Abraham and Abimelech and it was there that God affirmed his covenant with Isaac. God reassured Jacob that he should go to Egypt where he would make him a great nation. He also promised to return him to Canaan, a promised fulfilled when Joseph and his brothers buried Jacob in Canaan (50:13). Note that the chapter begins with Jacob being identified by his alternate name Israel which would become the name of a nation. God’s prophecy about returning to Canaan also applied to the nation which would return from Egypt some 400 years later. God had also prophesied to Abraham about the captivity his descendants would endure in Egypt (15:13) and Jacob was surely aware of that. Regardless of that knowledge, Jacob’s response to God was complete submission, he took all of his belongings and his entire family to Egypt, leaving nothing behind in Canaan. We are told that he took their livestock and the possessions that had acquired in Canaan along with his sons, daughters and grandchildren. A listing of Jacob’s sons by each of his wives is provided including the next generation, a family totaling 70 people. David Guzik noted that the family had only grown to those 70 in the roughly 135 years from Abraham to Jacob yet Israel would number about 2 million when they left Egypt 400 years later thus fulfilling God’s promise they would become a great nation in Egypt. After a tearful reunion of Joseph and Jacob the chapter ends on what appears to be an unusual note. Joseph very carefully explained to his brothers how they were to present themselves to Pharaoh. He would tell Pharaoh they were shepherds and they were to confirm that fact. Joseph told them they would be allowed to settle in Goshen because shepherds were detestable to Egyptians. Matthew Henry pointed out that Goshen was a thinly populated area where there would be little contact between Jacob’s family and the Egyptians. Also finding better positions for his brothers would have exposed the family to charges of favoritism.

While Jacob may have been confused by what he may have considered to be God’s changing plans, he was obedient. Unlike the bank’s changing strategic plan, God never changes. Jacob was not privy to God’s complete plan, He provided Jacob direction to use him to accomplish specific purposes at specific times just as He had used Abraham and Isaac earlier. He brought Abraham to Canaan to separate him from a family that practiced idolatry. He had Jacob and his family to leave Canaan to protect them from the sinful influences of the Canaanites and he sent them to Egypt knowing that the Egyptians would not want to intermarry with them. Only after they had grown to a great nation of 2 million people did God send them back to claim their inheritance.