

Old Testament History

Lesson #4

Genesis 37:1-Exodus 1:7

Outline

I. ***The Account Of Jacob And Joseph (37:1-50:26)***

- A. Joseph's dream of supremacy (37:2-11).
- B. Joseph sold by his brothers (37:12-36).
- C. Judah and Tamar (38:1-30).
- D. Joseph's rise to greatness in Egypt (39:1-41:57).
 1. Joseph in Potiphar's household (39:1-23).
 2. Joseph's imprisonment (40:1-23).
 3. Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dreams (41:1-36).
 4. Joseph given authority in Egypt (41:37-57).
- E. Joseph reunited with his brothers (42:1-45:28).
- F. Transition to the Exodus (46:1-50:26).
 1. Migration to Egypt (46:1-27).
 2. Preservation in Goshen (46:28-47:31).
 3. Jacob's blessings on the twelve tribes (48:1-49:28).
 4. Jacob's death and burial in Canaan (49:29-50:14).
 5. Joseph's death (50:15-26).

II. ***The Exodus From Egypt (1:1-15:21)***

- A. God remembers His people (1:1-2:25).
 1. A summary of the children of Israel in Egypt (1:1-7).

Notes

Genesis 37:1-39:23

- At this point, the personal history of the patriarchs ceases with Jacob, and it now merges into a history of the children of Israel -- the family and the tribes. The purpose of God with the patriarchs as individuals had been fulfilled when Jacob had become father of the twelve.
- The personal manifestations of God to individuals had also ceased. The single exception was when the Lord appeared to Jacob as he went to Egypt to give him assurance that by His will Israel was removed from Canaan, and that He would eventually bring them back to the land of promise.
- The scriptural history of Joseph opens when he is 17 years old. The account gives us insight into the ill-feeling and jealousy of the sons of Leah towards the children of Rachel. Joseph seems to have united some of the best characteristics of his ancestors. Like Abraham, he was strong and prudent; like Isaac, patient and gentle; like Jacob, warm and

affectionate. Best of all, his conduct was very different from his brothers.

- Joseph was hated by his brothers, not so much by the fact that he had received a “coat of many colors,” but because this was a tunic which princes and persons of distinction often wore, and it signaled to Joseph’s brothers how their father really felt about him.
- The first of Joseph’s two dreams included only his brothers, while the second included his brothers and his father. The way in which Joseph told the dreams must have been offensive, because his brothers hated him for his “dreams” and his “words.” Even his father rebuked him after the second dream.
- When the brothers had the chance, they sought to get rid of him. Only Reuben dissented, not so much from a love of his brother, but from consideration of his father. He wanted to cast him in a well, hoping to later rescue him and restore him back to his father. Joseph ended up being sold to the Ishmaelites (Judges 8:24) for 20 shekels (cf. Leviticus 27:5). The brothers’ deception was successful, and Jacob wept bitterly, refusing all the comfort which his sons hypocritically offered.
- Chapter 38 vividly contrasts the immoral character of Judah with the moral character of Joseph. The first verse notes only that these events occurred “at that time.” Without this remark we would have little basis for relating these events to the story of Joseph. In the overall strategy of the book, however, this chapter plays a crucial role. The story begins with the mention of three sons. Two sons died because of their evil. The point of this chapter is to show that the continuation of the house of Judah lay in Judah’s hands. The narrative that follows shows that he does nothing to further his own household. It takes the righteous Tamar to preserve the seed of Judah. The story is much like the other patriarchal narratives outside the story of Joseph, which show the promised offspring in jeopardy and the patriarch showing little concern for its preservation.
- The name “Potiphar” frequently occurs on the monuments of Egypt (written either Pet-Pa-Ra or Pet-P-Ra), and it means “dedicated to Ra” or the sun. In his service, Joseph was faithful, honest, upright, and conscientious because he knew he served a heavenly Master. The sculptures and paintings of the ancient Egyptian tombs vividly portray Joseph’s duties. They show that methodical and minute supervision was exercised over the operations of agriculture, gardening, the keeping of cattle, and fishing. Every product was carefully registered to check the honesty of laborers.
- Joseph was a young man, and everything which surrounded him would blunt his morality, rendering the temptation of Potiphar’s wife even more powerful. Nevertheless, he resisted evil because he dreaded sinning

against God. Perhaps Potiphar showed mercy on Joseph, for the punishment given in Egypt to the crime of which she accused him was far more severe than what Joseph received.

Genesis 40:1-41:57

- Eleven years had passed since Joseph was sold into Egypt, and yet the divine promise, conveyed in his dreams, seemed farther than ever from fulfillment. The greater part of this time had probably been spent in prison.
- Joseph had not been in prison long when, by the direct leading of God, both dreamed in the same night. By the same direct guidance, Joseph was led to notice their anxiety, and inquired about its cause. The dreams were natural, and the interpretation was natural -- yet both were directly from God. The two dreams were essentially the same. In both cases, the number three indicated three intervening days before Pharaoh's birthday. The event showed the hand of God in the interpretation.
- However, Joseph was left in prison for two more years until Pharaoh dreamed two dreams in the same night. After no one was found to interpret, the butler remembered Joseph. Again, the two dreams were the same, one relating to livestock and the other to agriculture. With great wisdom, Joseph suggested storing the plenty for the time of famine. God's sovereign power is highlighted in the fact that though the cupbearer did forget Joseph at the time, he remembered just at the right moment and thus served as the means for Joseph's ultimate rise to power. Joseph was promoted and his name changed to Zaphnath-paaneah, which probably means "the supporter of life" or "the food of the living."
- Joseph was 30 years old when he was elevated to his position over Egypt, the same age at which Jesus began His public work. Joseph never abused his power; he proposed that the people contribute one-fifth of their produce in lieu of all other taxation. But because of the severity of the famine, Pharaoh came to possess all the money, cattle, and land in Egypt.
- The same gracious hand of the Lord, which, during his stay in prison, had kept him from sin, disbelief, and despair, now preserved him in his exaltation from pride, and from lapsing into heathenism. Moreover, he considered himself "a stranger and a pilgrim" in Egypt. His heart was on his father's home, his father's God, and his father's promises. When his wife bore him two children, he gave them Hebrew, not Egyptian names. Joseph's great lesson which he learned was to wait on God. He would show the way, and lead to the end.

Genesis 42:1-45:28

- When the brothers went down to Egypt, there would have been a tremendous physical change in Joseph, but very little change in them. As he saw them bow before him, his dreams must have vividly come back to his mind. Their appearance before him seemed to imply that God had not meant to separate him permanently from his family, and that he had been sent before to keep them alive. However, before the reunion of the family, it was necessary that the brother's heart undergo a change from their jealousy, and this must be ascertained before he made himself known to them. When we see the narrative this way, we can understand the conduct of Joseph.
- If Benjamin were placed relative to them in the same circumstance of favoritism as Joseph had been; and if, instead of envying and hating him, they were prepared, even when exposed through him to shame and danger, not only to stand by him, but to suffer in his place, then it would show that they had repented in the truest sense, and their state of mind was the opposite of what it had been 20 years ago.
- The reference of Joseph to fearing God (42:18) must have cut the brothers to the heart, as it brought in contrast their own harsh conduct toward Joseph. For the first time, they discuss their bitter guilt of the past, and how God was now visiting it. They even spoke in Hebrew in the presence of Joseph, not knowing that he could understand them. He had to quickly excuse himself so he would not reveal his identity.
- As the first provisions had been consumed, the sons of Jacob needed to go Egypt again. This time it was Judah who offered himself as surety for Benjamin. Joseph prepared a large feast for the brothers. Twenty-two years had passed since he had been separated from his brother, and now Benjamin stood before him -- a youth a little older than he when his bondage had begun.
- The charge of theft took the brothers by surprise. In their conscious innocence, they offered to surrender the life of the guilty and the liberty of all the others if the cup were found with any of them. However, the steward was instructed to isolate Benjamin from the rest, so a search was made and the cup found in Benjamin's sack.
- Judah tenderly pleads with Joseph for mercy, and he could not restrain himself. He revealed his identity to his brothers and assured them of God's hand in the matter of preserving them, for only two of seven years of the famine had passed. Jacob then went to Egypt with the brothers, eager to see his long-lost son again.

Genesis 46:1-48:22

- A difficult path lay ahead of Jacob, as yet he had no direct contact from God. On the other hand, God's dealings with Joseph, the invitation of

Pharaoh, and the famine in Canaan served to point out that it was the period which God had spoken to Abram (Genesis 15:13), when his seed would leave Canaan and become strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt.

- The children of Jacob went forth as sojourners for a temporary purpose. The circumstance that they were shepherds, and as such “an abomination to the Egyptians,” kept them separate politically, religiously, and socially from the rest of the people, and caused them to be placed in a region by themselves (Goshen).
- Before Jacob went to Egypt, he traveled to Beersheba, built an altar there, and offered sacrifices to the God of his father, Isaac. It was there that he received the needed assurance from God. His words gave Jacob a four-fold assurance: 1) God was the covenant God; 2) Jacob need not fear to go down to Egypt; 3) God would make a great nation from him; and 4) God would go down with him and bring him up again.
- Jacob sent Judah in advance of his arrival in Egypt. The meeting between Judah and Joseph was very affectionate and touching. Joseph informed Pharaoh of his family’s arrival in Egypt. He stressed the fact that by occupation they were shepherds. This would allow them to stay in Goshen, which was very suitable for pasturage, and at the same time the most isolated area from the general population of Egypt.
- Egyptian monuments show that shepherds were considered as the lowest class, probably because their nomadic habits were so opposed to the settled civilization of the country. After settling in Goshen, Jacob lived 17 more years. Before his death, he sent for Joseph, making him promise to bury him with his fathers in the cave of Machpelah.
- As of yet the sons of Joseph had not been formally adopted into the family of Israel. But the two oldest, Manasseh and Ephraim, were to become heads of separate tribes, for Joseph was to have the double portion of the firstborn. Joseph manifested great faith in turning away from the honors of Egypt and casting his sons’ lots with the Israelites. In the blessing, Jacob gave preeminence to Ephraim over Manasseh. Although Manasseh had more men than Ephraim in the time of Moses, this was reversed in the time of the judges, and afterwards Ephraim continued, next to Judah, as the most powerful tribe in Israel.

Genesis 49:1-50:26

- As the last episode in the life of Jacob had come, he gathered his sons around him for one final blessing. The words he spoke to them were words of blessing and prediction. Although these prophetic pictures are not exact representations of a specific period or event in the history of Israel, they are grand characteristics of Israel as a whole. Furthermore,

in general, the name of the ancestor seems to unfold the future character and history of the tribe.

- Reuben was guilty of instability regarding his lusts. Simeon and Levi were companions in evil because of their cruelty at Shechem. As they had united for evil, God would scatter them in Israel, so that they would not form independent tribes.
- The sons of Joseph had received a twofold territorial portion, but Judah also received the privilege of the birthright. As the lion is the king of the forest, so Judah was to bear Jesus, the Son of David, the "lion of the tribe of Judah." Earthly blessings would also flow to Judah, emblematic of the rich spiritual blessings enjoyed by his portion.
- Zebulun was to possess a large dwelling, which his name represents. Issachar means "reward" or "hire." In its rich portion of Lower Galilee, the tribe labored quietly and dominated the region. Although Dan was only the son of a handmaid, he would not be behind his brethren, but would "give judgment" to his people (possibly a reference to Samson). The brief statement regarding Gad contains a wordplay on nearly every word. They would often be attacked by hostile powers on their borders (Judges 10:8; Jeremiah 49:1), but they would be victorious over their enemies.
- In the case of Asher, the reference is evidently to the most fertile possession of the tribe. In the future Asher's sons would enjoy great abundance and rich delicacies. The allusion of Naphtali is to the graceful agility and mental quickness of the people.
- Jacob has much to say about the future of the tribe of Joseph. In substance Jacob's statements repeat much of what was said about the other brothers after Judah. The difference, however, is the repetition of the word "blessing." Whereas Jacob's words regarding the other brothers paint a picture of the future well-being of the sons and thus figuratively speak of a future blessing, Jacob's words to Joseph explicitly refer to this future well-being as a "blessing."
- The picture of Benjamin is similar to Judah's. Both depict the patriarch's future in terms expressing a victorious conquest over the enemy. In both the conqueror is a vicious predator, the lion and the wolf. The stark simplicity of these words to Benjamin, however, brings out the sense of sudden victory and conquest in much stronger terms than the imagery of Judah.
- After the blessings, Jacob once more charged his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah. Jacob died peacefully, the most pilgrim-like of the pilgrim fathers. His last wishes were obeyed to the letter. The account of the embalming and the funeral strictly agrees with what we have learned from Egyptian monuments and history. The custom of funeral processions existed in every province of Egypt.

- Joseph lived another 54 years in the land of Egypt, and had the joy of seeing his father's blessing begin to be fulfilled. Although Joseph had attained great honor in Egypt, his last act was to disown Egypt and choose the lot of Israel -- poverty, contempt, and pilgrimage. His last deed was to take a solemn oath of the children of Israel to carry his bones with them into the land of promise. Thus Joseph, being dead, yet spoke to Israel, assuring them that they were only sojourners in Egypt. Now, long centuries of silence were to follow. During all that weary period of the misery of bondage, there was neither voice from heaven nor visible manifestation to warn or to cheer the children of Israel in Egypt.

Exodus 1:1-7

- In the Hebrew, the book of Exodus begins with the words, "And these are the names of" (which is the Hebrew name for the book). This is the first example of a practice common to most of the historical books of the Old Testament: the use of the simple copulative "and" to begin a book (cf. Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-2 Samuel), which indicates an ongoing sequence of revelation.
- From the earliest times, Egypt was the great granary of the old world. The extraordinary fertility of the country depends, as is well known, on the annual overflow of the Nile, caused in its turn by rains in the highlands of Abyssinia and Central Africa. The land of Goshen to this day is considered one of the richest provinces of Egypt.
- The family list in Genesis 46 details that the six men of Leah had twenty-five sons and two grandsons, totaling thirty-three; the two sons of Rachel had twelve sons, totaling fourteen; Bilhah's two sons had five sons, totaling seven; and Zilpah's two sons had eleven sons, one daughter (apparently counted here), and two grandsons, making sixteen. This equals the total of 70. Genesis 46:26-27 starts with the figure of 66 (apparently omitting Er and Onan, since they died in Canaan, as well as deleting Joseph and his two sons, since they were already in Egypt, but adding Dinah, feeling she could not be deleted). To this total of 66, it added Joseph, his two sons, and Jacob himself, for a total of 70.
- Three and a half centuries passed between the close of Genesis and the events with which Exodus opens. During that long period the history of the children of Israel is almost an entire blank. As the children of Israel came out of this time, they were prosperous and probably had been assimilated to a great degree by the Egyptians.
- With the language of God's promised blessing of multiplication and increase as given to Adam (Genesis 1:28), Noah (Genesis 8:17; 9:1, 7), Abraham (Genesis 17:2-6; 22:17), Isaac (Genesis 26:4), and Jacob

(Genesis 28:3, 14; 35:11; 48:4), Moses recorded that God had been fulfilling His plan during the years Israel was in Egypt.