

From PRISON to Palace

A Study of the Life of Joseph

Class 6 • Joseph Restored • Genesis 46 - 47

1. God's blessing on Israel and his children, 46:1-7.

a. Israel seeks God's approval to leave for Egypt, v. 1.

(1) Note the increased references to "Israel" rather than "Jacob." This emphasis draws our attention to a man changed through a divine encounter with Jehovah, who has received ratification of a great promise given to his father Abraham (32:22-32; 35:9-15)

(2) In spite of his initial decision (45:28), and his yearning to see Joseph, yet he first seeks God's approval to temporarily leave the land of promise, cf. "do not be afraid to go down to Egypt," v. 3. This action indicates a man with God's perspective having the priority in his life, a true man of God. Jacob had respect for God's Word and will over and above regard for his family!

(3) The journey from Hebron to Beersheba was a spiritual pilgrimage to a sacred shrine where Abraham (21:33), and Isaac (26:25), had called upon the name of the Lord, and theophanies appeared to Hagar (21:17), and Isaac (26:24).

(4) His sacrifices provided access and signified faithful submission. Though extremely happy at Joseph's invitation, yet he hesitated to leave the promised land since Isaac was earlier forbidden to travel to Egypt in a time of famine (26:1-4).

b. God gives Jacob leave to go down to Egypt, vs. 2-4.

(1) God identifies Himself as "God, the God of your father [Isaac]," hence the God who has unconditionally promised to bless the seed of Abraham. v2. 2-3a. "God's only speech in chs. 37-50 reiterates the promise to Abraham and Isaac (cf. 12:2-3; 26:2-5), assuring Jacob that his departure from the promised land will not void God's commitment to his forebears."¹⁰

(2) Why does God now allow Jacob and his family to go down into Egypt? v. 3b.

(a) It was necessary for the newly conceived nation of Israel to be protected from Canaanite pagan influences, as represented by the Amorites, while Canaan was judged with famine (15:13-16; 47:13).

(b) It was necessary for Israel to grow in a fat land, with some degree of separation, such as Goshen.

(c) Egypt was to be the womb for the formation and birth of Israel as "a great nation" (Deut. 10:22), with a gestation period of 430 years (Ex. 12:40-41).

(3) Jacob is assured of God's sovereign leading of Israel into and out of Egypt, v. 4.

(a) Hence, no enemies shall overcome them, nor shall the Egyptians assimilate them.

(b) But Jacob will die before the return to Canaan, in Egypt, yet in the presence of Joseph (49:33-50:1).

c. Jacob and his family journey to Egypt, vs. 5-7.

(1) Jacob is now 130, and he will spend his final seventeen years in Egypt (47:28). Now he is weaker in his old age and must be respectfully carried in Pharaoh's vehicles.

(2) Likewise, respect is given to the wives with their children. Such regard is fundamental to the living of God's people, that is when they are right with God!

(3) Hence, while Egypt may at times be a type of the world, here it rather pictures a place of refuge (cf. Matt. 2:13-15).

2. The children of Israel who are heirs of God's covenant blessing, vs. 8-27.

a. This updated list of Jacob's sons and their offspring groups progeny according to their mothers, vs. 8-25.

(1) The descendants of Leah, being thirty three, vs. 8-15.

(2) The descendants of Zilpah, being sixteen, vs. 16-18.

(3) The descendants of Rachel, being fourteen, vs. 19-22.

(4) The descendants of Bilhah, being seven, vs. 23-25.

b. The total reckoning of Jacob's family that migrated to Egypt, vs. 26-27.

(1) The listing in vs. 8-25 totals 70, which agrees with v. 27. However, v. 26 is concerned with "all the persons belonging to Jacob, who came to Egypt."

Thus we must here exclude Jacob, Joseph, and Ephraim and Manasseh, which number when subtracted from 70 gives us a total of 66.

(2) However, Stephen in Acts 7:14 declares that 75 were descended from Jacob at this time. From where do the additional 5 come from? Apparently Stephen is quoting from the Septuagint or Greek version of Genesis 46:20, 27, which adds to the text three grandsons and two great-grandsons, as mentioned in Numbers 26:28-37.

(3) Thus this small Hebrew tribe of 70-75 persons will yet leave Egypt some 430 years later as a nation with 603,550 men twenty years of age and older (Num. 1:46). This exodus probably exceeded two million when women and children are included. But such growth is according to grace through promise (Rom. 11:28-29), and in no way according to works.

3. Israel and Joseph are reunited, vs. 28-30.

a. Judah is wisely selected to go ahead and discuss with Joseph the place in Goshen where they have been appointed to reside (44:18-34), v. 28.

(1) Traditional Jewish interpretation suggests that Judah, having been appointed by Jacob as head of his sons, over Reuben, therefore went ahead to establish a house of teaching, so highly was their children's education regarded.

(2) Thus Joseph, out of respect, will go from his residence, probably in Rameses, cf. 47:11, to his father's appointed allotment nearby in Goshen, and not vice versa.

b. Joseph's meeting with Jacob is one of submission and satisfaction, vs. 29-30.

(1) Normally, people would come and pay their respects to Joseph, but this time it is different. Jewish tradition tells us that when Joseph had come close to his father, he bowed himself before him down to the earth. Then Joseph fell upon Jacob's neck and wept, even sobbing with trembling. He was particularly grieved that he had permitted his father to bow down before him but a little while before. (Jacob had earlier bowed before some Egyptian dignitaries and not known that Joseph was present).

(2) The weeping and embrace were extended with speechless emotion, since it

was twenty two years after they last saw each other. Now Joseph's original dream was completely fulfilled. Now Jacob understood the greater bliss and blessing that Job experienced after such a prolonged trial (Job 42:10-17).

APPLICATION:

• **Jacob was “ready to die” after he saw his son alive. How does a belief in resurrection affect your views on death?**

(3) Israel is so supremely satisfied with the presence of his beloved son that he is now content to die in peace; he is not as other parents who die heart-broken concerning their children. How well this ecstasy illustrates that how we die is more important than how we live!

4. Joseph honors Jacob's family in Egypt, 46:31-47:12.

a. Joseph makes provision for his father's flocks, 46:31-34.

(1) He first declares the “low status” of Jacob's family, that is their shepherd lineage, which was so distasteful to the Egyptians. Evidently Joseph had not mentioned this aspect of his background to Pharaoh.

(2) But because of his unimpeachable stature, Joseph will yet gain favour for his family, and at the same time promote their necessary separation from pagan influences.

(3) Consequently, Israel and his sons are not to conceal their shepherd background. They are to be truthful and also gain the best grazing land.

(4) Again we notice Joseph's care for his family as a dutiful son, even though his princely image might be tarnished.

b. Joseph introduces Jacob to Pharaoh, 47:1-12.

(1) Joseph presents himself before Pharaoh, vs. 1-6.

(a) Joseph's position of privilege does not result in presumption regarding Pharaoh's generosity (cf. 45:17-20); rather he seeks his formal blessing, v. 1.

(b) Who were the five brethren presented before Pharaoh? Probably Benjamin, his favourite, Simeon who initiated the problem and was kept in an Egyptian prison, Reuben the firstborn, and Judah who made such an eloquent, selfless plea before Joseph. But who would probably the fifth? Perhaps Levi, v. 2.

(c) Pharaoh's concern for Joseph's sake is spontaneous, magnanimous, vs. 3-6.

1) Imagine how relatively uncultured and low in status this Hebrew gathering looked, with beards, shepherd's clothing and its attending aroma!

2) But their attitude is humble, honest and loyal to their “fathers,” v. 3, which characteristics Pharaoh has learned to appreciate in Joseph, vs. 3-4.

3) Pharaoh's graciousness and respect is evidenced by his willingness to appoint any able brethren to care for his own cattle, vs. 5-6.

(2) Jacob is presented before Pharaoh, vs. 7-10.

(a) With great reverence, Joseph presents his aged father to Pharaoh; there is no shame, only esteem and love. Likewise Jacob felt equal delight in his son. Jacob's “blessing” of Pharaoh was the invoking of Jehovah's

mercy upon his pagan “superior,” v. 7.

(b) Pharaoh’s enquiry regarding Jacob’s age is probably a result of the patriarch’s weathered countenance, v. 8.

(c) Jacob declares his age to be 130, and summarizes the days of his life as being “few and unpleasant,” v. 9.

1) Jacob considered his life to have been relatively short when compared to Abraham who lived to 175, and Isaac who lived to 180.

2) He also looked on his life as being full of trouble sadness (cf. 25:28; 27:41-45; 29:21-25; 30:1-2; 31:1-3, 23-42; 32:6-8; 34:1-31; 35:19; 37:33-34; 42:36), often self-inflicted.

3) However, note that his life is yet a sojourn, a pilgrimage, a mere passing through, so to speak (Heb. 11: 13-16).

(d) Jacob’s further blessing of Pharaoh (cf. v. 7), v. 10, reflects Hebrews 7:7. This concluding prayer of benediction indicates that for Jacob there is only one sovereign God, and thus he testifies about Him. Further this God has blessed Jacob to a place of privilege far above that of Pharaoh.

(3) Joseph preserves Jacob and his brethren, vs. 11-12.

(a) Ramases is identical with the region of Goshen, being in the north-east portion of the Nile delta. So Joseph probably lived close by his Father and brethren, v. 11.

(b) Thus none lacked in their newly reconciled state, even down to the little ones. Joseph’s care, the blessings of his redemption, were total, v. 12.

5. Joseph prospers Pharaoh during the famine, vs. 13-26.

a. The severe state of the famine, v. 13.

(1) Illustration. The severity of this famine must not be underestimated. One historian tells of a famine in this region so bad that the eating of human flesh was common, and the road between Syria and Egypt was a vast field sown with human bodies.

(2) God sent the famine to judge the Canaanites as well as for the protection of Israel (Ps. 105:12-17).

(a) As a small band, the tribe of Israel was troubled by Canaanite influences, as the early character of the brethren seems to indicate.

(b) But God jealously guarded His own children (Ps. 33:18-19; 37:18-20, 25).

(3) Famine is frequently a product of godlessness, even among God’s people (Ezek. 5:5-17), as is even evident today. But God’s man prospers through faith even in the worst conditions (Hab. 3:17-19).

b. Joseph acquires money for Pharaoh, v. 14.

(1) He first requires payment for grain by money. The grain is never merely given away as a welfare gift.

(2) This results in three positive advantages.

(a) Joseph’s reputation is yet further enhanced as a faithful steward, and thus Jehovah is glorified.

(b) Pharaoh becomes not only the ruler, but also the owner of Egypt.

(c) The people are guarded from the traps of welfarism, such as making a needy people slothful and presumptuous. There is no government dole; grain and food must be earned.

(3) There is no suggestion that the grain price was outlandish, but it was

reasonable.

(4) Note the implied integrity of Joseph, for the money went not for himself, but into Pharaoh's treasury.

c. Jacob acquires real estate and labour for Pharaoh, vs. 18-26.

(1) "When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year" KJV, but the NASB better reads "they came to him the next year," which in fact was the final or seventh year of the famine, v. 18a.

(2) The people offer their land and bodies for food, vs. 18b-19.

(a) Should they offer their liberty for life? But in this situation, rebellion would do them no good.

(b) However, remember that the people are subjecting themselves to Joseph for Pharaoh, their appointed rulers. The true child of God desires subjection to Christ as Saviour, not freedom from him even when our souls experience a famine.

(3) Joseph revises the Egyptian economy and so consolidates Pharaoh's reign, vs. 20-26.

(a) Remember that the obtaining of all of the Egyptians and their land by Pharaoh was an emergency measure. Extreme laws are often required when disaster strikes. However, it would seem implied from v. 20 that the Hebrews were treated differently from the Egyptians who alone surrendered themselves.

(b) To facilitate distribution, the people are gathered around the larger cities, knowing that at the end of the year, relief is in sight, v. 21.

(c) The Egyptian priests are exempted from such submission, for already they have land given to them by Pharaoh, and eat from the grain which he supplies, v. 22.

(d) A nation dependent upon welfare is put to work in the final year, in anticipation of rain and bountiful crops. Drones are not tolerated, v. 23.

(e) The earlier emergency tax of one fifth (20%), not a tenth, is made a permanent fixture (cf. 41:34)! Reconstruction was probably in mind; it also could be protection against a similar famine in the future, vs. 24, 26.

(f) The welfare populace respond with an attitude that is uncommon today, v. 25.

1) A gratefulness for grace.

2) A willingness to serve both Joseph and Pharaoh.

3) Thus Joseph gains favour with the people and Pharaoh as Egypt's saving sovereign.

APPLICATION:

• **Matthew 5:6 is a familiar verse. How does it apply to the story of Joseph? And what about your life?**

. How plainly we see here the necessity of hunger and poverty in both the Hebrew and Gentile so that they might be driven to a gracious saviour (47:19, 25), as is supremely the case with Jesus Christ. Those who so come respond with gratefulness for grace, and willingness to serve (cf. Matt. 5:6; John 6:35).

6. Joseph promises to bury Jacob in Canaan, vs. 27-31.
- a. Whereas the young nation suffered in Canaan when out of fellowship with God, now having been reconciled, they prosper and multiply. Note how Jacob's new name is now equated with his seed, v. 27.
 - b. Jacob was 130 year of age when he came to Egypt, and approximately 12 of his 17 year sojourn there are gone. He has yet 5 years before he dies. But what counts is that his end is better than his beginning, v. 28.
 - c. Jacob makes preparation to die, vs. 29-31.
 - (1) Many men in old age attempt to ignore death while at the same time fearing it. But Jacob prepares for his death with strong hope.
 - (2) Joseph is to be the executor of Jacob's will since he is best equipped morally and politically to carry it out, v. 29a.
 - (3) The oath which Jacob's administers is a solemn call to loyalty. Since children came from the thigh or loins, it signified swearing according to one's life and being, v. 29b.

APPLICATION:

• What inspiration do you get in your life by Jacob's insistence on being buried back in Canaan?

- (4) Jacob requests that his body be buried in Canaan, specifically the ancestral cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca were already buried. But why this request? vs. 29c-30a.
 - (a) To avoid heathen Egyptian practices regarding burial at his death, and thus wrong associations.
 - (b) To declare his dying faith in Jehovah and His promise that the great nation would reside in Canaan (46:3-4; 48:3-4).
 - (5) Thus Joseph signifies his agreement under oath. His integrity was not in question; he simply and solemnly testifies to the gravity of his commitment. Also Pharaoh, would more likely agree to such a duty when asked for leave; such reasoning is in fact employed (50:4-6). Consequently, Jacob now rests in peace, v. 30b-31.