

## ***Beginnings and Belongings*** ***From Prison Cell to Palace***

Lesson #12 for December 23, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 34-41.

1. In this lesson we shift from Mesopotamia to Egypt, from the actions of Jacob to the actions of his sons and daughter. Dinah is raped (Genesis 34) and Reuben sleeps with his father's concubine (Genesis 35:22) who was old enough to be his mother. Judah (in his early 20's) moves away from home and into Canaanite society, (Genesis 38) marries a Canaanite wife, has three children, two of whom are killed by the Lord, sleeps with his daughter-in-law, who gives birth and thus becomes one of the ancestors of Christ, while Joseph ends up in Egypt and refuses to commit adultery with Potiphar's wife. (Genesis 39) At what ages did these events occur in the lives of Jacob's children? Try to imagine the feelings of Jacob as he went through all of these experiences.
2. Isaac had waited until he was 40 years old to marry and someone else chose his wife but the relationship between Isaac and Rebekah seems to have been quite good. Jacob (more than 40 years old) picks out his own wife but ends up with four of them! Then his children had all kinds of problems in their sexual relationships!

Jacob was 120 at the death of his father (Genesis 25:26). Ten years later, at the age of 130 years, he stood before Pharaoh (Genesis 47:9). At that time Joseph had been governor of Egypt for nine years (Genesis 45:11). Jacob was therefore 121 years old when Joseph was promoted at the age of 30 (Genesis 41:46), and 108 when Joseph was sold at the age of 17 (Genesis 37:2). Consequently, Isaac was 168 years of age when Joseph was sold into slavery. Since this tragic event occurred while Jacob was living at Hebron with his aged father (Genesis 37:14), Isaac witnessed the grief of Jacob and survived that event for a period of 12 years. (*SDA Bible Commentary* on Genesis 35:28)

From this we can see that Jacob was 85 years old when his first child was born! We can assume that his four "wives" were somewhat younger. Judah, no more than 23, married and had three children, the first two of whom were married and were killed before they were out of their teens!

3. How much do we know about the wives of Jacob's sons? Only two are even named – Judah's daughter-in-law, Tamar, who gave birth to two of his three surviving sons, and Asenath, the wife that Pharaoh gave to Joseph (known in Egypt as Zaphenath Paneah—"God speaks and lives"). (Judah's first wife is called only Bathshua which means "daughter of Shua"-1 Chronicles 2:1-4) Where did these wives come from? Except for Joseph's Egyptian wife, were all the others Canaanites?
4. In light of these experiences, what would have happened to the descendants of Jacob if they had remained in Canaan?
5. We have already noted that Ishmael and his descendants have disappeared into history. Now we also see that Esau and his descendants largely disappeared into history. (Genesis 36) What was different about the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and now Jacob's 12 sons and one daughter that made them the heritage of the faithful?
6. What happened to Dinah? After being raped by Shechem, did she ever marry? Did she marry someone from among Jacob's workers or extended family? Why don't we hear any more about her descendants?
7. Look at the events that are recorded from the early life of Joseph. If all we knew about Joseph were these events before his sale into Egypt, what would we think of him? What was there in

the early life of Joseph that prepared him in any special way for his future?

8. How much do you think the lives of the sons of Jacob were affected by the relationship between their father and their various mothers?

As these sons arrived at manhood they developed serious faults. The results of polygamy were manifest in the household. This terrible evil tends to dry up the very springs of love, and its influence weakens the most sacred ties. The jealousy of the several mothers had [209] embittered the family relation, the children had grown up contentious and impatient of control, and the father's life was darkened with anxiety and grief. {PP 208.3}

9. What specific events made the sons of Jacob even more jealous of Joseph?
10. Read Genesis 38. Why do you think this story is included in the record? Wouldn't it have been better to leave it out? These are the ancestors of the royal line of David and the ancestors of Jesus Christ! Is Jesus trying to make sure we understand the deficiencies of his human ancestors?
11. Read Genesis 38:6-9. What did the first two sons of Judah do? They could not have been more than teenagers when they were married. What does the Bible mean when it says God killed them? Was Onan's behavior serious enough to be killed? Why do you think Judah sent Tamar back home to live with her parents after his first two sons died? Why do you think Tamar became pregnant from one intercourse? Did God have anything to do with that? It was from that specific relationship that the royal line descended! Why do you think Judah was living apart from the rest of his family at that time?
12. Contrast the behavior of Reuben and Judah with that of Joseph down in Egypt. Why were the brothers so different in their behavior?
13. In light of what we know so far, what do you think would have happened if Jacob and his family had remained in Canaan? Did God take the family of Jacob down to Egypt in order to preserve them from intermingling with the Canaanites and disappearing from history?
14. **What would we do with a family like this in the University Church?**
15. Returning to the story of Joseph, why do you think his brothers hated him so much? Why do you think Joseph reported their bad behavior to their father? Was he trying to gain favor with his father or did he have a more righteous objective? Compare the story of Jacob's early experience with that of Joseph's. What was it that ultimately made these two stand out for their moral character? Was it the adversity that they were forced to go through? What does adversity do to a person?
16. Why do you think Jacob favored Joseph? Could he see something different in Joseph's character?

In Joseph, Jacob sees a thirst and hunger for God. Joseph has a far different character than his brothers. A spirit of godliness dwells in him; he is pure, joyous, active, diligent, morally earnest, gentle, faithful, and truthful. He takes to heart the story that his father tells of God's mercy and Providence, and his heart yearns for God. Jacob sees the same love for God in his son that he himself holds so precious. No wonder Jacob loves him so! *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, p. 141

There was one, however, of a widely different character--the elder son of Rachel, Joseph, whose rare personal beauty seemed but to reflect an inward beauty of mind and heart. Pure, active, and joyous, the lad gave evidence also of moral earnestness and firmness. He listened to his father's instructions, and loved to

obey God. The qualities that afterward distinguished him in Egypt--gentleness, fidelity, and truthfulness--were already manifest in his daily life. His mother being dead, his affections clung the more closely to the father, and Jacob's heart was bound up in this child of his old age. He "loved Joseph more than all his children." {PP 209.1}

17. Why do you think Jacob chose to make that special "royal" coat for Joseph? Is that an indication of his plan to favor Joseph later in his life?
18. What ages were Joseph's brothers when they thought of killing him and then sold him to the Ishmaelites? If Joseph was only seventeen, the oldest of them could not have been more than twenty-three. Since the Ishmaelite train would have passed very close to the tents of Jacob in southern Palestine, why didn't Joseph convince them to take him to the home of Jacob where they would have received a much higher price for him than they ever could have received in Egypt?
19. Down in Egypt and working for Potiphar, Joseph began an exemplary life. He had no Bible and as far as we know, he had no contact with other people who faithfully worshiped the true God. How do you think he maintained his honesty and his moral uprightness in those circumstances? How could he avoid the corrupting influences of the society that surrounded him?
20. Did Potiphar believe his wife's story about Joseph? If he really believed that Joseph had attacked his wife and tried to rape her, what would he have done with Joseph?
21. Try to imagine how this story might have been different if Joseph still had been in prison when his brothers were thrown into prison during their first visit to Egypt. What might they have said to him? What if he had been put in charge of caring for them in prison?
22. We are familiar with the story of the dreams of the butler and the baker and Joseph's accurate interpretation of their dreams with God's help. (Genesis 40) Why do you think it was necessary for Joseph to remain in prison for another two years before God chose to bring about his rescue?
23. What did Joseph learn during his time in Potiphar's household and in prison that helped to prepare him for his later work as prime minister of Egypt? Did Joseph ever become seriously discouraged while in prison?
24. When the king had the visions about the cows and the stocks of grain, the butler remembered about the interpreter of dreams that helped him while he was back in prison. When Joseph was called to appear before the king, he shaved himself carefully and dressed appropriately. Do you think he had any idea about what was going to happen when he went to see the king?
25. There are very few people in scripture about whom nothing bad is recorded. There are no bad stories told about Joseph after he arrived in Egypt. Is that because Egyptians don't record bad things that happened to their leaders or because Joseph's character was so upright?
26. Would we be better Christians if we had to suffer a little more persecution and struggle through more hardships? Both Jacob and Joseph seem to have experienced great growth in faith when they suffered and were taken away from their homes. Why do you think so few Christians in our day seem to suffer for anything? (2 Timothy 3:12)

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