

Beginnings and Belongings

The End of the Beginning

Lesson #13 for December 30, 2006

Scripture: Genesis 41:41-50:26.

1. If nothing else, the story of Joseph is a story of amazing reversals! Joseph went from being the petted son, to slave, to top manager, to prisoner, to palace - saving his “adopted” nation and family from starvation. What were the background conditions that made it possible for this story to take place? The people who ruled Egypt at that time were called Hyksos, a nomadic Asian people, probably Semites, [the Egyptians themselves were descendants of Ham] who controlled Egypt from 1720 B.C. until 1560 B.C. [from Greek *Huksos*, name of ruling dynasty in Egypt, from Egyptian *hq's'sw* ruler of the lands of the nomads]. They ruled Egypt from a city in the eastern Delta of the Nile, not far from Goshen.
2. How much do we know about the background of this story from extra-biblical sources? Why is it that there is no archaeological evidence or any trace of the Israelites to be found in Egypt or the Sinai Peninsula? Does that bother your faith?
3. Was God responsible for the famine that occurred in the days of Joseph? Since Egypt is watered primarily by the Nile and the headwaters of the Nile are in East Africa, did the famine spread to all of East Africa as well? How many people died in this famine? Was the famine sent just for the benefit of Jacob's family? What was the “benefit” of the famine to Jacob's family?
4. Was God manipulating conditions on this earth? How close is the relationship between heaven and earth? How often are events that take place on earth affected by the work of angels and even God himself?
5. Was God playing favorites? While we see the book of Genesis was written from the perspective of the Jewish people and their ancestors, wasn't God also trying to reach out to save Canaanites and Egyptians? What impact did the events of these chapters in Genesis have on the Canaanites and Egyptians?
6. Picking up the story at the time when Joseph was chosen as the new prime minister of Egypt, what else happened to him? (Genesis 41:45,46) Asenath was the daughter of Potiphera, a priest in the city of Heliopolis. Did Joseph have any choice in his marriage? What about Asenath? Was Pharaoh trying to find a way to integrate Joseph into their Egyptian culture and religion?
7. Since Joseph knew from the interpretation of the dream that famine was coming, shouldn't he have warned his family back in Canaan before they ran out of food? Even during the years of plenty shouldn't he have alerted his family so they could prepare?
8. We know what was coming in terms of the future of the Hebrew people in Egypt. If the families of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had been better representatives of God and more faithful to the truth would it have been necessary for them to go through all the events in Egypt? How many people from Canaan had become followers of God because of the witness of Abraham and his descendants?

If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, they would never have been

seduced into idolatry, nor would it have been necessary for them to suffer a life of bondage in Egypt; they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses. {PP 364.2}

9. Jacob and Isaac mourned for several years for Joseph whom they thought was dead. (Isaac lived for twelve years after Joseph was sold into slavery) Why was all that suffering necessary? Was that part of God's overall plan?
10. Did the brothers ever talk about Joseph during those 13 years?
11. When speaking to Joseph on their first visit, they told him quite a few details about their family. Did Joseph pry these details out of them or did they volunteer them? Was that the work of the Holy Spirit?
12. Do you think anybody besides the 10 sons of Jacob knew about the true fate of Joseph before the facts were finally revealed in Egypt? Did the 10 brothers remain faithful to each other by not even revealing the truth to their wives?
13. Do you think the various tests that Joseph put on his brothers were his plan or God's plan? After returning to Canaan with their first load of grain and finding the money in their sacks, do you think the brothers had any idea that there were still five more years of famine?
14. When it came time for the sons of Jacob to return to Canaan to get more food, Reuben suggested to his father that if Benjamin did not return safely from Egypt, Jacob could kill Reuben's two sons. (Genesis 42:37) What would be accomplished by that? What do you think the two sons thought about their father after hearing such a rash statement? Does that sound like the carefully thought out suggestion of a mature father?
15. When the 10 brothers arrived back in Egypt with Benjamin and were reunited with Simeon, they were invited to a banquet at the prime minister's (Joseph's) home. (Genesis 43:16,17) Much to their surprise they found themselves seated in order according to their ages! Why do you think Joseph placed five times as much food on Benjamin's plate? Did any of the brothers have the slightest idea that they might find Joseph somewhere in Egypt? Did they look for him as they traveled through the streets?
16. After placing his special cup in Benjamin's sack and sending his servant after his brothers during their return journey to Canaan, Joseph was ready to give his brothers their final test. He told them that he would just keep Benjamin as his servant and the rest of them could go home. Judah intervened and pled for Benjamin in a way that completely convinced Joseph that his brothers were changed men. (Genesis 44:18-34) Then Joseph told all the Egyptians to leave the room and then he announced to his brothers - in Hebrew - that he was Joseph! Try to imagine yourself in their situation! What were they thinking? When they finally were able to speak, what do you think they said? What went through the mind of Benjamin? Was that the first hint to Benjamin that the story of Joseph's death was a fabrication?
17. What do you think it was that convinced Joseph that his brothers really had changed? What was it that changed these brothers? Was it just a matter of time? Was it the suffering that they went through? Was it their own internal recriminations? Was it their father's example? Was it the suffering that they saw Jacob go through? Which of these factors do you think would have had the biggest impact on you?

During the years since Joseph had been separated from his brothers, these sons of Jacob had changed in character. Envious, turbulent, deceptive, cruel, and revengeful they had been; but now, when tested by adversity, they were shown to be unselfish, true to one another, devoted to their father, and, themselves middle-aged men, subject to his authority. {PP 225.3}

18. Did changes need to take place in the heart of Joseph? Was it easy for Joseph to forgive his brothers? Why does it seem almost impossible for people in the Middle East to forgive each other in our day? Why are they still fighting over the Crusades?
19. What needed to happen between Joseph and his brothers before everything could be completely restored to a "right" condition? Was forgiveness and acceptance all that was necessary? Or was a true change in attitude and character needed?
20. Finally the brothers were ready to set off in royal style to return to Canaan to collect their families and their father to bring them to Egypt. How many other people do you think accompanied them? Did they have servants, or even slaves, themselves? Did they say anything to Esau or his family and his descendants? Did they say anything to their immediate neighbors about why they were going to Egypt or even that they were going to Egypt?
21. What do you think the 10 sons said to Jacob about Joseph? What was the most convincing evidence or information in the eyes of Jacob that led him to believe that Joseph was really still alive? What did Benjamin have to say?
22. Try to imagine the meeting of Joseph and Jacob after so many years. Picture Joseph in his royal attire and Jacob in his shepherd's clothes. Were they hugging and crying!
23. What did Joseph say to his brothers about what they should say to Pharaoh regarding their occupation? Why was it important for them to tell the Egyptians that they were shepherds? Why did the Egyptians despise shepherds? Was their occupation as shepherds their "protection," as God's "special people," from intermingling with the Egyptians?

Abraham had been greatly favored by the king; even now Pharaoh would permit no harm to be done him or his company, but ordered a guard to conduct them in safety out of his dominions. **At this time laws were made prohibiting the Egyptians from intercourse with foreign shepherds in any such familiarity as eating or drinking with them.** {PP 130.2}
24. Knowing what you do about the family of Jacob, would you have chosen them as the one family to work through to carry God's message to the world?
25. Review the blessings that Jacob pronounced on his children. (Genesis 49:1-28) Where did Jacob get the information about the future of his children's descendants? Why wasn't Dinah mentioned? Were those futures revealed to Jacob by God? Or did Jacob just know his children well enough that he could anticipate their futures?
26. Can anyone, even God, predict the future? Did the children of Jacob have free choice? Or were their futures pre-determined by these prophecies? Do we have free choice?
27. **Review the book of Genesis in your mind. Think about Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Seth, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and his four wives and these 12 brothers, with their only sister. Do we know more about their spiritual successes or about their failures? Why does the Bible go to such length to spell out the sins of the saints?**

28. The book of Genesis ends with the final events in the life of Jacob and Joseph. **One biblical sage suggested that the book of Genesis could be summarized by reading the first five words and the last four: "In the beginning God created...A coffin in Egypt."** This is the beginning of the sad story of sin on this planet but not the beginning of the story of sin in the universe!
29. If you were asked to summarize the book of Genesis, what would you say? Some have suggested that the life of Joseph was a type of the life of Christ. What parallels do you see?
30. **Try to imagine your life spelled out in the book of Genesis.** Would a condensed version of the story of your life be a true witness for the cause of God?
31. We have suggested that the family of Jacob began with a lot of problems. It was truly a dysfunctional family! And yet look at what came out of it! Does this give you hope? Do any of us have experiences with dysfunctional families? How would you summarize the life of Jacob?

Jacob had sinned, and had deeply suffered. Many years of toil, care, and sorrow had been his since the day when his great sin caused him to flee from his father's tents. A homeless fugitive, separated from his mother, whom he never saw again; laboring seven years for her whom he loved, only to be basely cheated; toiling twenty years in the service of a covetous and grasping kinsman; seeing his wealth increasing, and sons rising around him, but finding little joy in the contentious and divided household; distressed by his daughter's shame, by her brothers' revenge, [238] by the death of Rachel, by the unnatural crime of Reuben, by Judah's sin, by the cruel deception and malice practiced toward Joseph--how long and dark is the catalogue of evils spread out to view! Again and again he had reaped the fruit of that first wrong deed. Over and over he saw repeated among his sons the sins of which he himself had been guilty. But bitter as had been the discipline, it had accomplished its work. The chastening, though grievous, had yielded "the peaceable fruit of righteousness." Hebrews 12:11. {PP 237.4}

32. What have you learned from this trip through the book of Genesis?

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Last modified: November 12, 2006

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