

LESSON 16 CLOSING DAYS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH

READING: Genesis 46 to 49

AIM: To consider the re-union and closing days of Jacob and Joseph, the significant blessing of Jacob's sons and the development of them into a nation in Egypt.

1. BACKGROUND

Because the famine was severe in the land of Canaan, and there was corn in Egypt, Jacob and all his family, with their possessions, left their home country to dwell in Egypt. Jacob wanted to see Joseph before he (Jacob) died.

Authorities suggest that at this time Egypt was ruled by the **Shepherd Kings**. They were Semitic warriors from Syria who successfully conquered Egypt and seized the throne. Like the Israelites they were a pastoral people or shepherds.

If this was the case we can understand why this Pharaoh welcomed Joseph's brethren as shepherds, and even suggested they might take charge of his cattle (Gen. 47:6). He evidently did not share the Egyptians' hatred of shepherds and so when Israel came into Egypt they were received by a sympathetic monarch.

The sojourn in Egypt was necessary to bring about the development of Israel into a nation. In God's purpose as foretold in Gen. 15:13-15, the descendants of Abraham were to sojourn in a strange land, and then come out a wealthy people.

2. GOD'S PROMISE TO JACOB – Gen. 46:1-7, 28-34

At **Beersheba**, a town in the south of Canaan, Jacob halted and offered sacrifices to God. This was the place where Abraham had called upon the name of the Lord and where God had repeated the Abrahamic promises to Isaac.

Jacob received the assurance that in Egypt his people would become a great nation and afterwards be brought forth to their own land again. Jacob was also told he would see his beloved son Joseph. Joseph went out in his chariot to meet Jacob and there was a tender and affectionate meeting. Joseph instructed his brothers to emphasise to Pharaoh that they were shepherds, notwithstanding the fact that shepherds were "an abomination unto the Egyptians". This would facilitate their isolation in **Goshen**.

3. ISRAEL IN GOSHEN: SEPARATE – Gen. 47:1-12

Pharaoh received Jacob and his family kindly for Joseph's sake. When he learnt that they were shepherds he appointed them land in Goshen. The other parts of Egypt were not suitable for sheep and cattle, neither the climate nor the pasture.

Goshen, the most fertile part of the land, was near the Nile delta, in the region of Rameses. Situated in the north, the Israelites were removed from the native Egyptians, though possibly other foreigners shared Goshen.

Not only was Israel provided with the best and most suitable land, they were also separated from Egyptian idolatry and given every opportunity to remain faithful to the one true God who had so mercifully preserved them.

4. CLOSING DAYS - Gen 48

Jacob was an old man when he came to Egypt. The time of his death was near and he desired to give blessing to Joseph's two sons, **Manasseh** and **Ephraim**. He decided to regard them as his own sons, thus making them heads of the tribes of Israel.

There were twelve sons of Jacob, but later the tribe of **Levi** was appointed to the priesthood and was not counted as one of the twelve. So in God's plan the number was kept at twelve by counting Joseph through his two sons as two tribes (Ezek. 47:13). In this manner Joseph was specially rewarded and blessed with one portion more than his brethren. (Gen. 48:2)

Manasseh and Ephraim occupied the position of sons like Reuben and Simeon (Gen. 48:5). But of the two, the higher position was given to the younger; Ephraim was given the pre-eminence. Joseph thought his father had made a mistake due to his great age and blindness, but Jacob had made no mistake, "guiding his hand wittingly" (Gen. 48:14) "by faith" (Heb. 11:21). Years after, the tribe of Ephraim was accounted greater than that of Manasseh.

5. JACOB'S PROPHECY CONCERNING ISRAEL – Gen. 49:1-27

Jacob was confident in the promises of God. After assuring Joseph that God would fulfil His promise and bring them again to the land of their fathers (Gen. 48:21) he called his sons around him and blessed each in turn. He told them what should befall them in their long history as the tribes of Israel. The blessings upon Judah and Joseph are particularly important.

Judah - Gen. 49:9-10

This blessing foretold the high honour to be given to that tribe:

- (1) **The Sceptre** (representing the throne) was not to depart from Judah until Shiloh come (whose right it is, Ezek. 21:27).
- (2) **The Lawgiver** (Christ was to come from Judah). Jesus Christ, "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" is to rule over a world-wide kingdom, when he shall provide a righteous law for Israel and when all people shall be gathered to him.

Joseph – Gen. 49:22-26

Jesus' life followed a similar pattern to Joseph's – one "that was separate from his brethren" (Gen. 49:26; Heb. 7:26). Two prominent titles of the Lord were associated with the blessings given to Joseph:

- (1) **The Shepherd** – Christ came as the good shepherd, who gave his life for his sheep (John 10:11). Christ's disciples are his sheep for whom he poured out his blood that they might have eternal life.
- (2) **The Stone** – Isa. 28:16 speaks of a "precious corner stone, a sure foundation" and we must build upon him.

Jesus, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, was hated of his brethren (the Jews) but received the blessing of God above all others and will at his second coming be reunited with those who once despised him.

6. JACOB'S AND JOSEPH'S DEATHS - Gen. 49:28-33; 50:22-26

Events surrounding Jacob's death in Egypt are described in Gen. 47:28-31 and 49:28-33:

"And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years. And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, if now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: But I will lie with my fathers and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying place. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. And he said, "Swear unto me. And he swore unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head"

Again, in Gen. 49:28-33, Jacob charged his sons to bury him in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan, where Abraham and Isaac were buried. After blessing his sons, Jacob died in Egypt, though God had promised him the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession. The promises have yet to be fulfilled.

Joseph and his brethren and many from Egypt went to Canaan to bury Jacob. Great mourning followed his death and the brothers approached Joseph again asking him to forgive their evil deeds against him. (Gen. 50:17). Again Joseph explained his God-given mission in Egypt.

Joseph continued to live in Egypt until he saw his children's children of the third generation. Before his death he gave a last message to the people of Israel reminding them of the promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to await the time when God would **"surely visit them:** to deliver them from Egypt. (Gen. 50:24)

Joseph, confident that this time would come, requested that they take his bones with them when they left the land, and bury them in Canaan (Heb. 11:22). It was some 150 years later that Joseph's coffin was carried from Egypt by the Israelites, throughout the 40 long years they wandered in the wilderness until they came to Canaan. (Exod. 13:19; Josh. 24:32).

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The words of blessing which Jacob pronounced on Joseph picturesquely capture the life and character of this godly son:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob: (Gen. 49:22-24)

Let us ponder upon such men as Joseph who never forsook God but always trusted His mighty power to protect and redeem

REFERENCE LIBRARY

"Elpis Israel" part 2, chapter 3

"The letter to the Hebrews". Chapter 5 (d).

"God's Way", chapter 5.

QUESTIONS

1. Describe Jacob's visit to Egypt and the beginning of Israel's sojourn there as a consequence.
2. What advantages were there for Israel living in Goshen?
3. What particular requests did Jacob and Joseph make concerning their deaths?
4. Describe how Jacob spoke of future things concerning Jesus when he blessed both Judah and Joseph.
5. What provisions were made to keep Israel a separate people while in Egypt?
6. Summarise Jacob's and Joseph's lives in the perspective of the history of Israel.